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# THE HEAVENLY LADDER

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COMPTON MACKENZIE



# THE HEAVENLY LADDER

BY

COMPTON MACKENZIE

*Author of "The Parson's Progress," "The Altar Steps," "Youth's  
Encounter," "Carnival," "Poor Relations," etc.*



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*The author wishes to repudiate most emphatically the existence of any portraits either in this volume or in the preceding volume, THE PARSON'S PROGRESS, or in the first volume, THE ALTAR STEPS, with one exception, which is the portrait of Father Rowley. It is impossible in a novel of this character for the wretched author not to hurt somebody's feelings, and he desires to apologize in advance for every corn on which he may unwittingly tread. He takes this opportunity of adding that, with the exception of St. Tugdual's, Nancepean, he is the architect of every church in this volume.*



# THE HEAVENLY LADDER

## CHAPTER I

### THE PARISH

MARK LIDDERDALE had been anxious to celebrate the feast of St. Michael and All Angels on his first Sunday in Nancepean; but his predecessor had left him a church so ill-equipped that he was obliged to wait until the arrival from London of the vestments and sacred vessels and furniture presented by his late vicar. He did not want to create a wrong impression in the parish by beginning in one way and continuing in another. He wanted the change in the style of worshipping to be complete, the transition to Catholicism to be rapid and sudden.

"Well, 'tis maybe so well to bide till Harvest Home next Sunday," his host of the Hanover Inn averred.

"Harvest Home?" Mark repeated in something like consternation. Of all festivals this was the last he would have chosen to inaugurate his cure of Nancepean.

"We belong to have our Harvest Home the first Sunday in October month," William John Evans explained. "And Chapel belong to have theirs the Sunday after. Chapel do always belong to close down for our Sunday, and we do always belong to close down for their Sunday."

Mark was perplexed. His first impulse was to insist that he was not going to overlay the octave of Michaelmas with pumpkins and vegetable marrows; but he knew Cornwall well enough to be sure that by such an act of omission he should offend his parishioners more deeply than by the most conspicuous act of commission. In view of the many difficulties before him it was surely better to allow this one

compromise with the existing state of affairs and to take advantage of the church's being fuller than usual to set forth his own plans for the future. For one thing he should have to make it quite clear that there was not to be any running in double harness with the dissenters. Mark looked back with some bitterness at his predecessor's broadminded habits; most of what the world called toleration was either laziness or cowardice.

"By the way, who are the churchwardens?" he asked. "And who is the sexton?"

"Gabriel Pascoe were made sexton when old man Timbury took and died; but his son Tom does mostly all the work," William John Evans replied.

"My dear life, I'm glad to hear 'ee call it work, William John," his wife interrupted fiercely. "I wouldn't ever have called it work."

"He do play the harmonium service time and do keep the churchyard fitty," Evans argued.

"Yes, when 'tis summertime and the visitors is here," Mrs. Evans went on. "But from now till April month that churchyard is a disgrace."

The landlord's bright blue eyes met for a brief moment his wife's sharp features and glowing contemptuous gaze; but they soon drooped like a pair of gay flags lowered in surrender.

"Aw, Tom Pascoe isn't so bad," he mumbled.

"Well, I do call him a good-for-nothing lazy rascal, and if I was Mr. Lidderdale I wouldn't lev him bury himself in my churchyard, lev alone bury other people."

Mrs. Evans stood firmly upon her opinion, one thin arm crooked and its long thin hand spread fanwise on her meagre hip. No more angular piece of womanhood was imaginable than she standing thus; yet the sincerity of her passionate disapproval was so tremendous that it gave a classic beauty to her countenance and to her form a slim and supple grace.

"What about the churchwardens?" Mark interrupted.

"I belong to be one of 'em," Evans announced with an embarrassed grin at his wife.

She sniffed loudly.

"And t'other were old William Pellow; but he died May month, and Parson Morse had a mind to make Job Lambourne down to Carwithen vicar's warden. But he put off asking the man, and then Parson died himself."

"I shall have to think about a suitable successor," said Mark. "And now, Mrs. Evans, I must ask you to put me up until I can get some furniture into the Vicarage."

He blessed his good fortune in coming like this to the Hanover Inn. Mrs. Evans might be a discouraging critic of his flock, and William John might be vague about the duties and responsibilities of a churchwarden, but he felt at home with them; and the keen interest that their boy Donald took in all his plans for making St. Tugdual's a living church again was of the happiest augury for his success with the children of Nancepean, and through them with their elders.

"I ought to go in to Rosemarket as soon as possible," Mark went on, "and choose the necessary furniture for the Vicarage. I have enough for my sitting-room; but I shall want some for my dining-room and for two bedrooms, which is all that I can furnish at present. Oh yes, and there's the kitchen, isn't there?" he added, with a guilty look at Mrs. Evans.

"Aw, my dear life," she exclaimed, "was ever anything like men made since the beginning of the world?"

"They was made before women," the husband guffawed. "And 'twas woman as caused all the trouble," he added.

"What nonsense you do talk, William John."

"Who give Adam the apple then?" he challenged.

"There was no call for the foolish crayture to eat it, was there?" she retorted.

"How not?" William John persisted. "If the man hadn't eaten it, she wouldn't have given him a moment's peace and quiet till he did."

"I'm sure if I was a man I'd be ashamed to talk so silly," his wife declared.

Mark interposed at this point to ask if William John could drive him into Rosemarket one morning and help him with his furniture. Mrs. Evans poured scorn upon the suggestion.



"Whatever would you and William John be buying?" she demanded. "Why, 'twas only a week ago I sent him in to buy me a new frying-pan, and he left it to the shoemaker's."

"I went back for it, didn't I?"

"Yes, and when you went back you left Donald's boots behind, and the child cried his eyes out because he hadn't a pair fit to put on for the Horses to Chypie Feast. No, if Mr. Lidderdale do want a kitchen, I must surely drive into Rosemarket and help him."

"You can't drive Balfour," her husband objected.

"But you can drive the three of us, can't 'ee," Mrs. Evans demanded.

"And who's going to look after the bar?"

"I can drive 'ee, mum," said Donald eagerly. "I know to drive Balfour."

"Donald! What have I told 'ee? You dare say again you can drive Balfour, and off to bed you'll drive that minute. You do know well I've forbidden 'ee even to touch the reins."

Mark's furnishing expedition began to seem impracticable.

"But how shouldn't I ask Dolly Masterman to look after the bar for a morning?" Mrs. Evans went on. "She've done it for me before now."

The landlord accepted with a grunt this solution.

"Oh, mum, lev me come too," Donald begged.

"Don't talk so wildly, Donald. You do know well you'll be to school."

"Well, Miss Vivian wouldn't mind for once."

"Donald!"

He looked up at her from wide deep blue eyes; but he knew her firmness of old, and like his father he surrendered, although he knitted his brows crossly and did not accept the defeat with his father's bland indifference.

Balfour, the six-year-old Evans pony, trotted very fast into Rosemarket, a great deal faster than the shaggy old pony behind which Mark used to drive twenty years ago with his mother and his grandfather. Yet Rosemarket with its steep and narrow streets seemed just the same; and when once in the course of the shopping Mark lost Mrs. Evans,

the years fell away like a veil from the face of time and he found himself gazing up and down the street for his mother's form to emerge from one of the shops. And driving back to Nancepean, all the furniture chosen, Mark was once more a child looking out as of yore for the double signpost where the great wide road that rolled southward ten miles from Rosemarket to Rose Head released an equally wide tributary to sweep round the east of the peninsula. There they all were, that crowd of strange names—St. Zaver, St. Oo, St. Marnack, Trethinnick, Penhallow, Roscarrack, Carveth, and Lanbaddern to the left, and straight on Nancepean, Chypie, Lanyon, Goon Major, Goon Minor, Penaluna, Polamonter, Nanstalon, Rose Head. In youth Mark had been wont to think of those names as the addresses of so many tall enchanters, and now if the signpost no longer had the power to conjure up the vision of such fantastic personalities, the names still possessed in themselves an almost terrifying potency. The thought of their changelessness all these years was mixed up with the more exhausting thought that nothing less catastrophic than another glacial period was ever likely to change them again. The wide road would go rolling south to Rose Head and rolling south-east to Lanbaddern. . . .

Mark was glad when the trap turned off to the right and took the lane that led along to Nancepean, where heath-browns danced in clouds above the yellowing bracken, and red admirals floated expansively along the first flowers of the ivy.

At the top of the village Mark suggested that he should get down and make some purchases of food at the shop. He noticed that a shadow passed across the face of Mrs. Evans, and with an involuntary impulse to propitiate her he asked if she would not dismount too and help him to solve the problem of what provisions he should buy for the Vicarage.

"Mrs. Pellow will be able to tell you that," she said coldly. "Come along, William John, can't you see that Balfour is jumping to be back in his stable?"

Mark felt discouraged when he turned aside up the path

bordered by dahlias and sunflowers and entered the buzzful drouthy little shop and leaned across the counter waiting for Mrs. Pellow to answer the bell which had tinkled sharply when the handle of the door was turned. Evidently the idea of his shopping here was distasteful to Mrs. Evans. He supposed that the two women were enemies, and he sighed to think that he had so soon trodden upon the corns of a situation. But he must make it clear from the start that neither as Vicar of Nancepean nor as his human self was he going to be made a catspaw of faction. It had been a mistake to seem to be trying to propitiate Mrs. Evans by inviting her assistance. It would have given the idea that he was as much afraid of her tongue as her son and husband were. This jealousy, one of another, must be sublimated. All the fervour and passion behind it must be utilized. Surely that was possible. It was only a matter of direction.

Mrs. Pellow came in from the back of the shop and put an end to Mark's meditation. She was a solid woman of about thirty, with upslanting eyes set wide like a cat's and full red underlip that drooped Buddha-wise, a woman whose likeness a sculptor might have been tempted to hammer straight from a block of granite without the docile mediation of clay. She had none of a cat's complacency or grace, but her manner had so much of the peculiar feline brusqueness that the effect of her personality was on the whole more that of a large cat than anything else. Mark had not known her as a girl. She had been the daughter of Mrs. Roswarne, a widow who had married Joe Dunstan of Polgarth and borne him three huge sons who with their father worked the windswept farm on the seaward side of Nancepean.

"I came in to buy a stock of provisions, Mrs. Pellow," the new vicar explained.

The mistress of the shop laughed heartily at this announcement, so infectiously indeed that Mark laughed with her, and only realized when he stopped himself that she had all the while been laughing quite soundlessly.

"How's George?" he asked. "He and I were boys together in this village." Mark wanted to add "and great friends," but he feared to provoke again that soundless



mirth, for as a boy he had loathed George Pellow, who had been a podgy little sneak, and it seemed to him that Mrs. Pellow would be sure to mock at the insincerity of claiming friendship with her husband.

"Aw, George is very well. He's gardener to Major Drumgold's."

"So Mrs. Evans told me," Mark said. He saw Mrs. Pellow's eyes narrow. A sudden whiff of cooking reached the shop from the cottage within and gave him an excuse to add hastily: "I'm afraid I've called at a bad time. I'm afraid you are just in the middle of getting your dinner."

"'Tis no matter," Mrs. Pellow assured him, and the manner of her speech was remote and inconsequent as that of a person encountered in a dream. Then a fat, pasty-faced little girl squeezed herself through the inner door, and, holding tightly to her mother's apron, stared up at Mark from eyes of a filmy blue like cabochon sapphires.

"How old is she?" Mark asked in a desperate endeavour to make his possession of the knowledge bridge an abyss of shyness.

"She'll be eight come January month," said the mother.

"She's a big girl for her age," Mark declared enthusiastically, feeling that if a young pig had entered the shop he should have asked the same question and made the same comment. "And what's her name?" he went on. And even that might have been asked about a dog.

"Winnie we do belong to call her, though, of course, she were christened Winifred."

This positive and unmistakable inclusion of herself in the situation caused the fat little girl to roll herself up in her mother's apron.

"She belongs to be shy with strangers," Mrs. Pellow explained. "Don't be so foolish, Winnie. 'Tis the new clergyman come to see us."

"We're going to have our Harvest Festival on Sunday week," Mark proclaimed, and hated his weakness for doing it with so much parsonic unction. "I hope that you'll help us with the decorations, Mrs. Pellow."

"George always belongs to bring down a cartload of vegetables from Major Drumgold's."

"That's capital," Mark said. "Well, I won't bother you now, Mrs. Pellow, but I wish that sometime you'd think out the problem of catering for the Vicarage. I'm counting on you. I shan't be moving in for at least another fortnight, so there's plenty of time. I'll come along again soon and pay a proper visit. What time does George get back from his work? I should like to have a chat with him over old times."

Mark rang himself out of the shop as he had rung himself in. Walking slowly down through the village empty and golden in the September sunlight, he asked himself why he should feel so much shyer of his parochial work here than in London. It was perhaps a consciousness of the changes he was going to institute in the manner of worshipping Almighty God which made him so apologetic, or was it the sense of permanence and changelessness up against which he found himself? These people were like the names upon that signpost, and the strange laughter of Mrs. Pellow was like the mockery of nature herself.

"Why, Ernest!" he exclaimed, to a tall figure who emerged at that moment from the glimmering cavern of the blacksmith's shop to wipe the sweat from his face. "You don't recognize me!"

"I certainly wouldn't never have known 'ee," Ernest Hockin admitted. "Only I were told you was come amongst us again."

It had been Ernie Hockin who with Joe Dunstan, the stepfather of Mrs. Pellow, had brought the news of the wreck to the Vicarage on the night that his grandfather was drowned.

"Yes, here I am again," Mark said, shaking hands. He felt a good deal more at ease with the blacksmith than he had felt with Mrs. Pellow. This was chiefly because he knew that Ernie Hockin was a devoted Wesleyan, whereas the Pellows were probably fluctuating worshippers in church, likely to be influenced by their opinion of the new vicar and without any standard of belief, with nothing indeed except

the promptings of their personal likes and dislikes to guide them. Hockin, on the other hand, might consider the new vicar the finest fellow in Cornwall and his own minister the greatest rascal; but such an opinion would have no effect on his religious opinions. He believed like his father and grandfather and great-grandfather before him that Wesley was the chosen vessel of the Lord, and that the word of God did not exist outside a Methodist chapel.

"I'm sure I wish you well," Ernie Hockin was saying.

"And I'm sure you mean that," Mark replied.

The best of British puritanism was embodied in the blacksmith of Nancepean, who might have served Longfellow for his ballad. A tall and graceful man with clean-cut features and clear unwavering eyes, he had married a farmer's daughter whom Mark remembered as the rosiest and jolliest girl in the village. At forty-three he was the father of eight children, the eldest of whom was a girl of nineteen, and the youngest a boy of three. Mark wished that they were in his flock, because with such a nucleus he should have high hopes for the future of the Church in Nancepean; although he should always have the consolation of knowing that they were being brought up as Christians, and that unlike so many little Puritans they were being taught to fear God more than man.

"I see you've built a new chapel, Ernest," Mark said, gazing down the road at the hideous oblong erected with gloomy permanence of elaborately dressed and pointed granite blocks. "It makes our poor little parish-hall next door look very humble. And yet I think I liked better your father's old cottage where you used to hold the prayer-meetings."

"Aw, 'twere too small altogether!" the blacksmith protested.

"Is your father still alive?" Mark inquired.

"Surely!"

"He must be very old."

"No, no, he's none so old. He's no more than seventy-nine, I believe."

"I'll look in and have a chat with him soon," Mark



promised. "No, I don't think I like your new chapel so well as the old cottage."

"But you see we've grown in numbers since then," the blacksmith said, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Well, I shall try to keep you from wanting a still bigger chapel," Mark laughed.

"We shan't want that for some long time," the blacksmith replied seriously. "We can hold three hundred. But the only time I ever saw it full were last election when the Liberal candidate gave us an address," he added.

"And you have your own minister now," Mark went on.

"Ess, ess; when Mr. Dale of Tallack gave the money to build it and show forth the glory of the Lord, his son the Reverend Cass were made minister."

"And Cass is very successful?" Mark asked. He could not get used to the idea of his old playmate's being a figure of such importance nowadays, though looking back at the boy he had known he felt that he ought to have expected quite as much from all that youthful exuberance and self-assurance.

"Oh, I believe we couldn't have no better man," the blacksmith replied. "Some of the local preachers was a bit against him in the beginning, because he didn't lev them preach so much as they'd a mind to. But there's none of we who could preach like the Reverend Cass. Well, we haven't got the learning, you see. And he's led Nancepean well in other ways. The Fishing Company declared a bigger dividend last year than was ever declared afore, and 'twere him who got a shilling a hogged more from the Penzance buyers than was ever known. And they do think a lot of him to Rosemarket. I wouldn't be surprised if he was chosen to stand for Parliament. There's no man more strong against drink. Why, 'twere only last Sunday as he did call beer 'Satan's honey,' and there was clapping of hands in the House of God, which weren't as it should be. Yet I believe the dear Lord did forgive the word, for it were surely well uttered."

Mark said that he must be getting back to lunch at the Hanover Inn.

"Where I'm staying," he added.

"So I heard tell," said the blacksmith. "Well, if I'd my way I'd close every inn and hotel and beershop in the land," he affirmed. "But I wouldn't wish any great harm to William John Evans, for he's a decent honest man. But you'll be moving down along to the Vicarage soon, I suppose?"

Mark said he hoped to be settled there within the next fortnight.

"'Tis a wisht old place," the blacksmith commented. "'Twere almost a pity you couldn't have taken the villa next to the Reverend Cass. 'Twould have been less lonely for 'ee."

Mark looked at the wedding-cake pinnacles of the two new villas and, repressing a temptation to cry 'God forbid!' he hurried back to the Inn where he found Mrs. Evans in what her son called 'some frizz' because he was late for his lunch. Mark hurriedly explained that he had been talking to Ernie Hockin, at which the brow of his hostess cleared.

"Didn't 'ee see Mrs. Pellow then?" she asked.

"Only for a moment. She was busy getting the dinner. But Ernie Hockin and I had quite a long chat."

"Ernest Hockin isn't a bad old chap," William John Evans proclaimed. "No man is more fierce against beer, but I believe he's honest. I've seen the man refuse a glass of port wine when all the rest of they blaring Radicals was swallowing it down so fast as medicine."

"Now, William John, don't 'ee talk so much, but leave Mr. Lidderdale eat his lunch. That is if it isn't quite ruined by being kept so long."

Mark decided to devote the afternoon to calling upon Major Drumgold, the secretary of the Lanyon Golf Club. His host offered to drive him as far as Church Cove, but he would not hear of it.

"Oh, dear, I wish I could walk with 'ee so far as the links," Donald sighed. "If you'd only come a bit sooner I wouldn't have had to go to school, because we were having holidays." He looked inquiringly and hopefully at his mother, but she merely said:

"And 'tis time you was gone, Donald."

When Mark came to the top of the long rise from Nancepean, he turned aside from the road and sat for awhile on the sweet short grass of Pendhu cliffs, contemplating the peacock sea below and staring away westward beyond its earthly reflections to where in celestial glitter it mingled with the sky. To his right the scattered cottages of Nancepean might have been bleached shells cast inland upon the valley, so small did they appear against the expanse of shimmering space in front of him. To his left the line of cliffs three hundred and fifty feet high swept round a desolate and sombre beach to the dark promontory of Pendhu, round the base of which the water even upon the calmest days was always troubled. The figure of a man was walking from that direction, his silhouette against the sky line giving to his movements such an air of loneliness and significance that his approach filled Mark with curiosity to know his business. He laughed at himself for adopting so soon the country point of view which ascribed importance to individual behaviour and discovered mystery in everything and everybody whose meaning and business was not immediately apparent. Presently Mark could see that the figure was carrying a branch of furze, and what would have perplexed a stranger to Cornwall more than ever revealed to Mark the newcomer's occupation. It was the huer, the sharp-eyed watcher (or rather the watcher gifted with peculiar power of vision) who all day long from August to October paces the cliffs to give the signal of fish approaching, of those schools of pilchards that may put as much as £2,000 in the pockets of those who live in such seaboard villages as Nancepean. The thrill of that old cry of "heva!" rang in Mark's ears from childhood. It used to echo along the valleys comparatively far inland, where those who were cultivating the slopes flung down their tools and ran seaward, himself hard at their heels and his heart beating against his ribs like the wind against the cliffs. In those days his grandfather had been president of the Nancepean Fishing Company, upholding their rights against Portrose, the next village north, and Lanyon, its neighbour on the south. More than once the Lanyon Gulls had tried to claim that the school

had passed the tall white pole just beyond Church Cove that marked the division between their waters and those of the Nancepean Daws. But his grandfather had upheld his parishioners fiercely in every dispute, and there was a legend that on the famous occasion when the Portrose boats tried to keep the Nancepean boats from shooting the seine Parson Trehawke himself and three other stalwarts fought the pirates with oars for half a summer's day and secured the safety of the catch. Nowadays the president of the Fishing Company was Cass Dale. It might appear to the scoffer a trifling matter which was president, the vicar or the minister; but Mark knew that, so long as the office was held by the minister, it was the visible sign of the triumph of Chapel over Church, and as such not to be tolerated for a moment longer than was inevitable. He looked up from his memories of the past as he made this resolution for the future and found that the lonely watcher on the cliff was his old friend Joe Dunstan, the tenant of Polgarth farm and the stepfather of Annie Pellow.

Joe had been a beefy young man of five-and-twenty when Mark saw him last; now he was a fleshy middle-aged man of five-and-forty with round apple face, and hair and moustache already quite grey, much older comparatively than Ernie Hockin had seemed.

"Well, Joe, how goes it? No fish yet this year, they tell me down along."

Joe Dunstan stopped, stared at the stranger who knew his name and his business, flung down the branch of furze, and held out a hand like a prime rumpsteak.

"By gosh!" he shouted. "'Tis boy Mark. Or I suppose I oughtn't to call 'ee that now. I knawed 'ee was come back to us, but I hadn't figgered 'ee as rale somehow until now, and darn 'ee, Passon Mark, 'twas the old days and the old manner of speech as come back with 'ee."

They were shaking hands violently while Joe said this, and for Mark this meeting was the happiest incident so far of his return to Nancepean.

"I never knew that you were huer, Joe," he said.

"Aw, I took on when old man Pascoe give it up. Well, I



were always counted to have the best eyes for the job, and with my three boys the farm isn't looked after too bad. But this year . . ." he spat on the ground to show what he thought of it. "We haven't had so much as the sight of a fish. Roscarrack have done well. So have Carveth, and even to Polamonter they've took a £600 catch, but we haven't had ne'er a sight of one."

"There's still time," Mark said.

"Oh, ess, ess, I've known so big a catch as any took nigh the end of October month. But I reckon Nancepean won't do much this year. Last year now we did well, and the year before. Well we did! And do 'ee find Nancepean much different after so many years?"

"The children are the greatest difference," Mark said. At which Joe Dunstan roared with laughter.

"That's good! Ess, I reckon the children *is* different. And there's a passel of 'em surely. Ess, I believe we've not done too bad these twenty years."

He went off into another shout of laughter, and his frank delight in the achievement of Nancepean shone from his ruddy round face with as much zest in his own performance as some old fertility god's.

"I haven't seen your boys yet."

"Well, they're fine young chaps. But the missus is a fine upstanding woman," Joe said.

"I've seen your stepdaughter, Mrs. Pellow."

"And she were a handsome maid. I wasn't any too pleased when she took it into her head to marry George Pellow. But there, 'twas another man made her. But if I'd made her myself and she were my own maid, I wouldn't answer for her, not when it come to marrying."

Mark talked for a little while longer with Joe Dunstan, and after promising to come and visit Polgarth as soon as he had time he turned back from the cliffs to the road and struck out along the downward slope to Church Cove.

When he came in sight of his church, he could not resist going in for a minute or two to fill his fancy with the picture of what it would look like one day. It looked dreary enough at present with the crowd of pitch-pine pews, with

the sacristy mouldering and empty and the keyboard of the harmonium like a row of decayed teeth, with wood-lice disturbed by the lifting of the crazy cover of the font, with nothing really to speak to the eye of God's worship here except a fragment of the old rood-screen painted in the most primitive style with five saintly forms, none of which was recognizable. Mark decided that his first ambition should be to replace with a square granite altar that abominable gothic whatnot of varnished deal. Would it be too much to ask his late vicar to present a stone altar in addition to all the rest he was finding for the church? Mark had no doubt that Mortemer would be willing, but was it fair to ask him? Well, that must be decided a little later on. Meanwhile, he must talk to Mrs. Evans about the cleaning of the church. Presumably Tom Pascoe, as sexton, was responsible for its condition. Mark made up his mind to see that Tom Pascoe was given to understand clearly his duties inside the church with the alternative of being relieved of them inside and out, with which reflection he passed through the south porch into the churchyard to observe how far Mrs. Evans' criticism of the sexton's laziness was justified there. Perhaps she had been a little severe, Mark thought, when he looked at the grass and the neatness of the graves and the glittering green fingers of the mesembryanthemums that overhung the wall on the south side, the base of which was heaped high with seaweed left from the last springing of the tide; but no doubt she would reply that this was too soon after the season of visitors for Mark to judge. Not having the key, he was unable to explore the strange squat tower quite separate from the church and apparently planted deep in the landward side of the rounded and isolated green cliff known as the Castle that protected the church from the direct attack of the sea. Instead, he climbed up the cliff and stood on the farther edge to gaze down into the narrow cove where his grandfather had been drowned in the attempted rescue of the crew of the *Happy Return* twenty years ago, where, a century before that, a ship from Portugal had been smashed to pieces and left her cargo of silver dollars to be swallowed up by the sand, and where, before

that a thousand years or more, two princesses of Brittany had been the only creatures saved from the wreck of some now unimaginable craft, and climbing ashore here had caused the tower and church to be built in gratitude to God and his saint Tugdual.

How fair this spot was upon this golden autumn afternoon, how rich the widespread view! Northward the road flowed down from Pendhu cliffs like a waterfall to lose itself in the sand of Church Cove, while a steeper road tumbled in a cascade from the headland on the farther side that hid the long line of the coast heaving southward to Rose Head. The tide was far out and displayed a wide stretch of wet sand all ribbed and scalloped and fluted by the crafty sea. Eastward in billows of turf the towans of Chypie rose to a stark horizon, mocking with their conformation the ocean below; while between them and the high ground rolling inland from Pendhu a vivid green valley, the curve of which concealed the Vicarage from view, allowed egress to a small stream that spread its waters like a silver fan upon the beach and babbled of earth to the sea. The landscape no longer possessed that supreme and perfect solitude which had marked it in the days of his boyhood, owing to the transformation since then of the towans into golf-links. However, at this distance the few players left over from the swarm of August were really not more obnoxious than sheep and akin to them in the outward silliness of their behaviour.

Mark climbed down from the Castle to the beach and amused himself for ten minutes, as he had often amused himself in childhood, by damming the course of one of the numerous rivulets into which the stream had broken up to join the sea, by doing which the whole pattern of its delta was changed as easily as the shifting glass of a kaleidoscope. Then he set himself to toil up the sandy cart track that mounted the towans and was the only thoroughfare between Nancepean and Chypie without making a detour of several miles. About half-way he turned to look back at the ever-widening view and saw to his disgust that Lanyon Head had been defiled by one of those huge hotels that out of the

season look like deserted conservatories. A golf-ball kicked up the sand a few yards ahead of Mark, and turning to see who had fired the shot he perceived the usual quartet advancing, the two players dressed with elaborate comfort, the two caddies managing to make themselves seem of no more personality in comparison with the two bags of clubs they were carrying than snails with their shells. It was Bernard Shaw, Mark recalled, who had said that elderly English gentlemen acquired golf instead of wisdom.

"I'm awfully sorry, sir. I'm afraid I nearly drove into you," said a slim, florid man with aquiline nose and eager eyes. He spoke with the excessively polite throatiness with which a well-bred English sportsman tries to impress on the individual who obstructs the course of a game that nobility is obliging in admitting that the least apology is due.

"Niblick, boy!" the golfer said sharply. "That's the third time in two days I've landed in the middle of this confounded road, Drumgold."

"Bad luck," his adversary replied, eyeing with a greedy glitter in his glaucous eyes his own ball waiting for a brassy on the resilient turf beyond.

Mark realized that this must be the captain of the Lanyon Golf Club to whose abode he was bound, and he thought that it would be an excellent way of avoiding what he knew would be a boring call if he introduced himself forthwith.

"Oh, by Jove, I'm delighted to meet you," said Major Drumgold. "Oh, yes, by Jove, that's all right. We've nearly finished our game. Let me introduce Mr. Whittington-Crowe. Look here, we've only three holes to play. You know what I mean? Why don't you stroll up to the clubhouse and wait for us, and then we can all go along and get some tea? Oh, bad luck indeed, Crowe!"

His adversary, probably put off his stroke by having to shake hands with a parson immediately on top of being bunkered, had just lifted a large spoonful of the road on the turf beyond and left his ball buried in the sand like a turtle's egg. Mark had not the heart to complicate the future of Mr. Whittington-Crowe's game by standing there and talking. After all, he had come out to call on Major Drumgold



and get it over, so he might as well fall in with his suggestion. Leaving the golfers, he walked on toward the clubhouse, which to his relief he found empty except for the inanimate crowds of sportsmen and sportswomen in the illustrated weekly papers.

A quarter of an hour later Drumgold and Whittington-Crowe came in, and, while they brushed their hair and washed their hands, fought their battle over again in words.

"If I hadn't run over at the ninth . . ."

Bubble—bubble—lather—splash—splosh!

"I ought to have been down in three at the fourteenth . . ."

Brush—brush—brush—brush!

"Why, that drive of yours at the sixteenth was a corker."

Bubble—babble—babble—bubble—rinse—rinse—rub—flap!

"Are you a golfer, Mr. Lidderdale?" Major Drumgold inquired.

"No, I prefer cricket," Mark said.

"Jolly good game too," Mr. Whittington-Crowe commented with approbation, but rather, Mark felt, as if he were patting a small child on the head for some precocious feat of athletics.

Major Drumgold's house, at the head of one of the tributary valleys diverging from the wide valley beyond the towans that separated the parish of Nancepean from Lanyon, was ten minutes' walk from the golf pavilion. It had originally been a four-roomed cottage, but had been considerably added to by the Major during the twelve years it had been in his possession. The garden, well sheltered from the north and east by the slope of the ground, looked as if it had been in existence much longer than twelve years. Among the members of the Lanyon Golf Club it was reputed to be the most remarkable garden in Great Britain. As a matter of fact, it was nothing like so remarkable as the Vicarage garden, and, of course, to compare it with the really great gardens of Cornwall was ridiculous; but then most of the members of the Lanyon Golf Club had only

seen of aided nature besides other golf courses their own and their neighbours' herbaceous borders up country.

Major Drumgold was a small man with grizzled red hair and a close-cut red moustache like a smear of treacle on his upper lip. His military bearing made of what would have been a noticeable inclination to tubbiness no more than the trimness of a small keg of brandy. Mrs. Drumgold, who was nearly twice as big as her husband, resembled the wreck of an iced madeira cake, with her blond hair, her pink powder, and her string of amber beads like candied peel.

"Care to stroll round the garden?" the Major asked. "How long before you're ready for us, Topsy?" he added to his wife.

"Oh, about twenty minutes," she replied, in a mincing, artificial voice, husky with an elaborately affected fatigue.

"You wouldn't like me to stay and give you a hand, sweetheart?" her husband suggested.

She brushed aside his goodwill like a tiresome fly; and the Major set out to show off his flowering shrubs with as much pomp of confidence as the verger of a cathedral.

"We've got no servants at the moment," he confided in Mark. "So I like to give the wife a hand if she wants it."

"Do you find the servant problem acute in Cornwall?" Mr. Whittington-Crowe inquired.

"Dreadful! dreadful!" the host exclaimed. "We simply cannot get girls to stay. They complain of the quietness."

Whittington-Crowe nodded sagely.

"They do that with us even in Surrey."

"What I say is, they ought to have lived in barracks all their life like me," said the Major. "They'd be glad to be quiet then. By gad, they'd welcome it! You know what I mean? They'd revel in it! If I had my way," he went on, digging his stick into the border and thus, as it were, piercing the very core of the problem. "If I had my way I'd start conscription for domestic service."

"Why not be a little more drastic," Mark suggested, "and revive slavery?"

"Why not?" the Major demanded. "It would stop a deuced lot of nonsense."

"I don't think that anything will stop human beings from talking nonsense," Mark said. "What's this shrub, Major Drumgold?"

"That? Oh, that's a splendid thing. That's one of the finest flowering shrubs ever introduced. That's—er—what is it? Oh lord, I know the name as well as my own. It comes from Japan, or is it California? That's it. Something californica. Or is it japonica? Californica—japonica? Japonica—californica? It's a splendid thing. Lovely yellow blossoms in June. Or are they red? Or white? It's a fine thing. Of course, you couldn't do that in Surrey, Crowe. I'd give you a cutting, if you could. But you couldn't. I wish to goodness I could remember what it's called. If I could remember that, I should remember what colour the dam blossoms are. Sorry to swear, Vicar, but I do get so jolly annoyed with my memory."

"Or if you could remember the colour of the blossoms you might remember what it was called," Mark suggested.

"The annoying thing is that I know the name as well as my own," the Major assured his guests. "But you couldn't grow it in Surrey, old chap," he added to Crowe. "Ten degrees of frost would kill it."

"Well, don't bother about the name, Major," said Whittington-Crowe. "What's this jolly feller?"

"That? That's one of the rarest shrubs in existence. That's—er—that's—George!"

Mark began to be interested. George Pellow was unlikely to be either beautiful or half-hardy; but at least he had a name, and he was a parishioner.

"George!"

But there was no answer.

"What an ass I am!" the Major exclaimed. "George has gone into Rosemarket to see about some plants I ordered. You know, I tell you what it is. If my memory gets much worse, I shall have to take up that blessed thing you see advertised everywhere. What's it called? Pullmanism. I'm sorry George isn't here, Vicar. If George had been here, he could have shown you the marrows we're keeping for the Harvest Festival. We always grow a few special

mammoths to put round the font, and after the Harvest Festival we send them to the cottage hospital. I'm sorry to say we failed with our pumpkins this year. I've always grown a few pumpkins specially for the church. The people like to look at them. We had the biggest pumpkin in the Rhos at Nancepean last autumn. Size of a balloon! Size of a balloon!"

"And who ate that?" Mark asked. "Not the patients in the hospital, I hope."

"Oh no, of course not. Nobody eats pumpkins except I believe Americans. It was taken to the school."

"The children ate it?" Mark exclaimed.

"It was used by Miss Vivian in the Botany class. But this year some confounded birds dug up the seeds. Birds are the curse of our life here," the Major affirmed with tremendous solemnity.

Mark hoped that Mrs. Drumgold would not be long over the tea.

"Why are they called the Lanyon Golf Links? Why not Chypie? Or even Nancepean?" he asked, to bring the conversation nearer to the Major's capacity.

"The hotel is nearer to Lanyon," Drumgold explained. "Very few people from Nancepean play. There's a jolly crowd of schoolmasters who stay with Mrs. Martin at Nankervis every August. That's the farm between your vicarage and here."

Mark nodded, and reminded the Major that he was not a stranger to Nancepean.

"In that case," said the little man, "you'll probably get on all right with them. But they're difficult. By gad, they're deuced difficult, don't you know. You haven't got Cornishmen in Surrey, Crowe."

The Major plunged into a dissertation on the complicated nature of the Cornishman, in the course of which he claimed that he was probably the only stranger who had ever been known to get on with them.

"I'll tell you what it is, Vicar. They like me. That's the secret of my popularity. I'm popular. They trust me. And," Major Drumgold added, assuming what he evidently



thought was an expression of immense knowingness, but which made him look like a fairly intelligent Irish terrier. "And I don't trust *them*."

At tea the servant problem, the quietness of the neighbourhood, the character of the Cornish people, and the vegetable marrows were discussed all over again. Mark took his leave as soon as he could. Major Drumgold accompanied him to the gate of the short drive.

"You can count on me," he assured Mark solemnly. "I wish you'd arrived when the visitors were here. We're a jolly crowd, and the collections are quite remarkable in August. I hope you'll toddle up and have supper with us when you're settled in at the Vicarage. George Pellow—capital chap, George Pellow—will give you any cuttings you want. You'll usually find me on the links. I'm keen. Deuced keen. They talk about the decadence of England. By gad, I'd like some of the croakers to see the old boys we get down here playing golf like a lot of two-year-olds. I'll tell you what, Lidderdale, if you want to begin golf, get my missus to give you a few lessons. She'll put you on the right track. You know what I mean? You'll begin with the right theory of the game. Now that the visitors have nearly all gone she's freer. And we expect to get two new girls in next week. Yes, we've heard of two girls."

Mark decided to walk back by inland ways to Nancepean. It was a country of narrow, winding valleys, the slopes of which were dark with furze brakes, their bottoms lush green moors watered by a maze of small streams. Here and there the horizon along the high ground was broken by a grove of elms round an isolated farmstead. The rich light of the westering sun, which was spread like butter on the landscape, seemed to exorcize the terror of place that had so strongly affected him upon his return to Cornwall, and not merely to obliterate all hostility, but even to impart to the land a positive benevolence, so that walking back to Nancepean upon this mellow afternoon Mark felt that everything was going to turn out much easier than he had thought.

## CHAPTER II

### INSTITUTION AND INDUCTION

MARK was summoned to Bodmin, there to be instituted by the Bishop, in his palace of Lis Escop, into the spiritualities of his Cure. Until recently the Bishop had been accustomed to perform this ceremony in public immediately before the Induction by the Archdeacon of the new Curate into the temporalities of his benefice; but during this year his health had become so bad that he had to spare himself as much travelling round his diocese as he could. During an episcopate of seventeen years John Prescott Meade, the third Bishop of Bodmin, had by his scholarship, his nobility, and his saintliness invested his young diocese with the dignity of a tradition, ripening it by his own personality even as the stones of the new cathedral were being mellowed by the moorland air and the soft Cornish rain.

When Mark met him in his library, he was reminded of his visit years ago with Father Rowley to Dr. Crawshay at Silchester. The Bishop sat upright in an oak chair, on the arms of which his hands, white as alabaster and like alabaster seeming faintly translucent, rested lightly as moths and against the high tapestried back of which his face appeared intagliated upon sardonyx.

"I am truly grieved, Mr. Lidderdale, that I cannot institute you publicly to your cure of souls or assist at your induction; but I have to reserve my strength for duties that I cannot perform in the comfort of Lis Escop. Colonel Greville, your patron, will be here presently, and I am glad to have an opportunity of a few minutes alone with you first. Please sit down, and I beg you will excuse my own immobility."

Mark felt thoroughly awed. It had been the habit in the

ecclesiastical circle of St. Cyprian's to laugh at the "High Churchiness" of Bodmin; but in the presence of the Bishop he was aware of a completeness of personality that transcended personality and became personification. While he was listening to him, he fancied that he could hear for the first time the authentic voice of the Anglican Church. The learned books upon the walls, the titles of which wrote themselves simultaneously upon his mind; the grey morning air and the Michaelmas daisies in a long line against the granite wall of the garden visible from his chair; the solid furniture and the sombre carpet; the steel engraving of Raphael's most famous Madonna over the mantelpiece, all these combined to evoke a sensation of such ageless being that Mark found himself in one of those brief eternities that exist like a discontinuous abyss in the continuity of time. It was a revelation of absolute reality, and even though it might seem like trying to illustrate the sun by the spark of a struck flint, Mark dared to think that in such moments one actually was granted an intellectual apprehension of God the Father Who created the world, because from such a revelation of reality one preserved a perdurable memory of perfection.

"I hear that you lived as a child with your grandfather when he was Vicar of Nancepean," the Bishop was saying. "That was before my time. You are fortunate, Mr. Lidderdale. I cannot imagine a greater privilege for a man than to return, like you, as a priest to the scenes of his youth. Little children are so very near to God, and I should suppose that you would be greatly comforted in any trials or difficulties by the remembered joys of childhood. And you will surely have both trials and difficulties, Mr. Lidderdale. I fear that the late incumbent of Nancepean allowed his preoccupation with the disappearance of the tribes of Israel to affect his parochial work. I hope you have no such bee in your biretta, Mr. Lidderdale."

"I hope not, my lord," Mark replied, wondering as he spoke if the Bishop intended to convey a fatherly warning not to be too "extreme."

"What are your hobbies, Mr. Lidderdale? You have worked mostly in London, have you not?"

"I really don't think that I have any hobbies, my lord. I've never had much time to acquire them."

The Bishop talked on for awhile about Mark's cure of souls and made some general observations on the strength of Nonconformity in Cornwall.

"The trouble with the Cornish has always been what I might almost call a shallow conservatism. No doubt you appreciate that defect of their character. But I have known several English priests in my diocese who have allowed themselves to be exasperated by it."

"I think I realize that nothing can be done except through the children," Mark said. "Luckily, Cornish people are so devoted to their children that they will even let them worship in the way they choose for themselves."

"Is your church well equipped?" the Bishop asked.

Mark explained that it was bare of everything except pitch-pine pews and that his late Vicar was generously giving him all that he required.

"That was Mr. Mortemer of St. Cyprian's, South Kensington?"

Mark nodded.

"I hope he won't be *too* generous, Mr. Lidderdale. I understand, of course, that you will want to make many changes in the conduct of the services; but I beg you—no, I won't beg you to do or not to do anything. I will leave it all to your own good sense and your desire to serve Almighty God."

Soon after this, Colonel Greville, the patron of the living, was announced. The Colonel was exactly like his name and his rank and his position. He was affable to Mark, whose acceptance of the living of Nancepean had relieved him of writing letters, for which he was grateful. Moreover, he was pleasantly conscious that the new incumbent had not worried him by alluding to the smallness of the income. Colonel Greville had not supposed that he should find a priest who would accept, without alluding to the anomaly, thirty pounds a year less than he paid his valet.



Finally, an invitation to shoot the coverts of a friend had compensated him for the trouble of making the railway journey from the far east of the Duchy to present his Vicar to be instituted. The Chaplain came in with the necessary documents, and Mark knelt before the Bishop holding the seal of the document that conferred upon him the spiritualities of Nancepean.

Colonel Greville coughed, blew out his cheeks, and said with a reminiscence of the barrack square :

"Reverend Father in God, I present unto thee Mark Lidderdale to be instituted to the—er—Vicarage of Nancepean."

"Let the Declarations and Oaths be made, subscribed, and taken according to Law," the Bishop said, on which Mark declared as follows :

"I, Mark Lidderdale, Clerk, do solemnly make the following declaration :

"I assent to the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, and to the Book of Common Prayer and of the ordering of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons. I believe the doctrine of the Church of England as therein set forth to be agreeable to the Word of God ; and in Public Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments I will use the form in the said book prescribed, and none other, except so far as shall be ordered by lawful authority.

"I, Mark Lidderdale, hereby solemnly and sincerely declare in reference to the presentation made of me to the Vicarage of Nancepean as follows :

"I have not received the presentation of the said Vicarage of Nancepean in consideration of any sum of money, reward, gift, profit, or benefit directly or indirectly given or promised by me, or by any person to my knowledge or with my consent, to any person whatsoever, and I will not at any time hereafter perform or satisfy any payment, contract, or promise made in respect of that presentation by any person without my knowledge or consent.

"I have not entered, nor, to the best of my knowledge and believe, has any person entered, into any bond, covenant, or other assurance or engagement, otherwise than

as allowed by sections one and two of the Clergy Resignation Bonds Act, 1828, that I should at any time resign the said Vicarage.

"I have not myself, nor, to my knowledge, has any person on my behalf, for any sum of money, reward, gift, profit, or advantage, or for or by means of any promise, agreement, grant, bond, covenant, or other assurance of or for any sum of money, reward, gift, profit, or benefit whatsoever, directly or indirectly procured the now existing avoidance of the said Vicarage.

"I have not with respect to the said presentation been party or privy to any agreement which is invalid under section one, sub-section three, of the Benefices Act, 1898.

"I, Mark Lidderdale, do swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to his Majesty King George the Fifth, his heirs and successors, according to law.

"So help me God.

"I, Mark Lidderdale, do swear that I will pay all lawful and canonical obedience to the Bishop of Bodmin, and his successors for the time being.

"So help me God."

Various prayers, versicles, and responses followed. Finally the Bishop, Mark kneeling before him, read a part of the legal instrument and added:

"Receive the cure of souls which is both thine and mine. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

And Mark, bowing lower, felt the hand of the Bishop flutter down upon his head like a blown leaf.

Mark was now in possession of the spiritualities of his benefice, but he would have to wait until next week before he was inducted into the temporalities by the Reverend Clement Wheatley Ashbottom, Vicar of St. Marnack and Rural Dean of the Rhos. He did not have another opportunity of talking to the Bishop alone, and soon after lunch he set out to the station accompanied for a part of his way by

the Canon Missioner of the diocese. Canon Tyacke was a tall, gaunt figure of a man, with a long iron-grey beard that matched the grey streets of Bodmin through which they were walking.

"The problem of the Rhos," he proclaimed in a hollow voice, "is its isolation from the mainstream of diocesan life. I have only once been able to preach even in Rosemarket, and I regret to say that I am completely and most lamentably ignorant of the remote parishes in the peninsula itself."

Mark felt while he listened to Canon Tyacke that he was about to take up work in a missionary outpost of the Pacific.

"You will have a long, hard battle with Dissent," the Canon went on. "Yes, I wish with all my heart that I could find time to lead a great campaign on the frontiers of the diocese. But . . ." the Canon Missioner stopped and indicated solemnly with his umbrella the turning Mark should take to reach the railway station:

"It is exactly twenty-one minutes to three. You will just catch your train."

He passed on down the street, moving with a ghostly portentousness of gait that tried to express the amount of spiritual business he had on hand and the impossibility of finding time to bring the stray sheep of the Rhos into the Anglican fold.

On the Sunday after his institution Mark walked up to Chypie to hear Mass, and was invited into breakfast by Kennedy the Vicar, a jovial pink cherubic creature with a pretty wife and three little boys like cupids, who with Mark made up the congregation.

Kennedy did not appear to be at all worried by its smallness.

"They never come to early Mass," he assured his visitor with a rich chuckle. "And they never stay on for the mid-day Mass. I get a certain number for Morning Prayer and about the same for Evening Prayer. But they like the chapels better, Lidderdale. I had a mission during my first Lent in Chypie. You know the sort of thing. Two priests looking like strips of cheese-rind. . . ."

"Oh, Arthur, how can you talk like that?" Mrs. Kennedy

exclaimed, holding the teapot suspended to mark her affectionate disapproval.

"Daddy doesn't look like cheese-rind," said the eldest boy. "He looks like a Dutch cheese."

"Oh, yes, doesn't he?" echoed the second brother. "Like that Dutch cheese we wolloed up and down the kitchen table, Simon, when Mawwy was so cwoss."

Both boys gurgled ecstatically, while the youngest, who was about four, went on stolidly and solemnly eating his porridge.

There was a short interval while the Vicar of Chypie tickled his two elder sons in spite of their mother's protest against behaviour at breakfast that was bound to give them acute indigestion.

"Well, as I was saying," Kennedy resumed when he was back in his own place. "I got these two missionaries to give it 'em hot and strong, and after a fortnight we had the church packed. It looked like a genuine revival, and the ministers were as sick as Satan at our success. But when the missionaries left, the converts left with them. Ha—ha—ha!"

The Vicar of Chypie tilted back in his chair and shook with laughter.

"What about the children?" Mark inquired.

"Splendid attendance during December," Kennedy replied. "It gets better and better right through Advent. But when the Christmas tree is bare there's a rush to the chapel, where they celebrate the New Year in more style than we do. Ha—ha—ha! Ho—ho—ho!"

"My husband laughs at everything," Mrs. Kennedy put in apologetically.

"Daddy's always laughing," added Simon, the eldest boy. "That's why he's so frightfully fat."

The meal came to an end in a wild chase round the room to the accompaniment of excited screams and joyous clapping of hands.

After breakfast, the weather having gone back to October's rain-washed blue and white, the two priests paced the Vicarage lawn, in the middle of which a large Benthamia



spread its branches hung with fruit like large crimson strawberries, a curiously appropriate ruler for the garden of this chubby pink priest.

"Well, I'm game for a strong forward policy," Kennedy declared. "But we shan't get any help from the rest of our brethren. All the clergymen in the Rhos are fossils, my dear fellow. Worse! They're dusty fossils. They're a byword in the diocese. However, they won't actually oppose us. They'll look very fierce, but they won't move. You know, like pterodactyls in the chalk. We'll have a bunch of them at your Induction on Thursday. I say, I wish you'd stay and preach for me this morning."

But Mark explained that, although he was not holding a service in Nancepean Church, he was going to say Morning and Evening Prayer without sermons in the little parish-hall.

"What a pity!" said the Vicar of Chypie, and, bubbling over with laughter, he walked as far as the end of the drive to speed his guest on the way.

The clergy were more strongly represented than the laity at Mark's Induction. They came from the remotest parishes of the Rhos, some riding on bicycles, some driving with beaded and bonneted wives in those governess cars that were known locally as jingles. Perhaps it was the last word that put Pickwick into Mark's head and made him whisper to Kennedy that Ramsey of St. Zaver, who was wearing black leggings half-way up his thighs, looked exactly as Mr. Nathaniel Winkle might have looked in mourning; at which, needless to say, Kennedy emitted a loud guffaw and provoked an indignant hush from the Reverend Clement Wheatley Ashbottom, Vicar of St. Marnack and Rural Dean of the Rhos.

"The biggest collection of freaks in England," he whispered to Mark, not in the least abashed by the stern glasses of the Rural Dean flashing upon him from the other end of the sacristy. "I hope to goodness my kids don't create a scandal. They insisted on coming with my wife. Look out, here comes old Ashbottom. You can hear his false teeth clicking from here."

The Vicar of St. Marnack, munching the air according

to his wont, advanced. He was of the saurian type, with a leathery skin and heavy-lidded dull eyes behind his glasses, which last against the dimness and grubbiness of the rest of him looked unnaturally polished. In the year of grace 1868 he had written a book to prove by the most abstruse calculations of Biblical chronology, that Adam was actually created on September 23rd, 4004 B.C., at six o'clock in the morning, thereby disposing at once of the ecclesiastical tradition that he was created on March 23rd, and of Dr. John Lightfoot's theory that he was created on October 23rd, 4004 B.C., at nine o'clock in the morning. In the year of grace 1912 he had not changed his opinion by a minute.

"I understand that the patron will not be present at the Induction, Mr. Lidderdale," he said. "In that case we shall proceed with the churchwardens."

"But there's only one churchwarden," Mark replied, looking round for William John Evans.

"Only one churchwarden?" the Rural Dean gasped. "But that is very irregular."

"The vicar's warden died early this year," Mark explained, "and my predecessor did not appoint anybody to take his place."

"Then where is the other? Dear me, I suppose I am in order in continuing the Induction? The Archdeacon said nothing to me about any deficiency. It's most perplexing."

Mark left the sacristy to find William John, who was sitting with his wife in the body of the church.

"But darn 'ee," William John protested in a gruff and horrified whisper. "I surely can't go marching round the church with all they clergymen."

"You'll do what the Vicar tells 'ee, William John," his wife commanded sharply. "Go along, you great foolish man, and don't show so hot and awkward. A pretty churchwarden you do look, and Miss Lambourne staring at 'ee and making herself out so haughty, as she always do belong."

Miss Lambourne was the sister of Job Lambourne of Carwithen, who had returned from nursing to keep house for her farmer brother, and was considered by everybody

in Nancepean to allow herself too many of the airs of a lady.

"Go on, Ba," his son urged; and William John Evans, his face a sunset, shambled unwillingly up the aisle behind his Vicar.

"Your churchwarden looks like a wrecked mariner surrounded by cannibals," Kennedy whispered to Mark in the sacristy crowded with black forms.

The procession formed up. The clergy marched into the choir stalls, while the Rural Dean mounted the pulpit and proclaimed:

"Dearly beloved in the Lord: in the name of God, and in the presence of his people, we are about to admit into this benefice our well-beloved brother in Christ, Mark Lidderdale, who has already been duly and canonically instituted as your Parish Priest by the Right Reverend Father in God, our Bishop in this diocese of Bodmin. Your Vicar had already received at his Ordination the gift of the Holy Ghost to enable him for the office and work of a priest, and he has made the solemn promises required; and at his Institution the Bishop has given him authority to exercise his spiritual duties towards you in this parish. And, forasmuch as the charge of immortal souls purchased by our blessed Lord and Saviour with His most precious blood is so solemn and weighty a thing, and because the good success of his ministry among you will depend under God upon the mutual love, and kindness, and forbearance of the pastor and his flock, I beseech you to join together as at other times, so now especially in hearty prayer and supplication to Almighty God, that of His mercy and grace He will send His Blessing upon this your Parish Priest, and upon all committed to his care."

After this the Rural Dean descended from the pulpit to be conducted by William John Evans to the church door, followed by Mark and a trail of clergy.

Here the Rural Dean flourished the Mandate of Induction, and placing Mark's hand on the key of the door, he said:

"By virtue of this mandate I do induct thee into the real,

actual, and corporeal possession of the Vicarage and Parish Church of Nancepean, with all the rights, members, and appurtenances thereunto belonging.

"The Lord preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth for evermore."

In order for Mark to be given the rope of the bell that he might toll it and thereby signify to the parishioners that he was taking possession, everybody had to go outside, cross the churchyard, and enter the isolated tower; and the wind, which was blowing with some strength from the south, made the surpliced clergy bob about like a string of washing on a line.

Mark tolled vigorously, after which he and William John conducted the Rural Dean to the font, where he vowed to pay attention to Baptism and Confirmation. From the font they wandered to the chancel, where Mark vowed to say his prayers diligently. From the chancel they roamed to the lectern, where Mark vowed to read God's Holy Word. From the lectern they made a rush for the pulpit, where Mark vowed to preach God's Holy Word. Finally from the pulpit they moved to the altar, where Mark vowed to celebrate Holy Communion frequently and devoutly.

More prayers followed and a hymn, during which William John asked if he might not go back to his seat and take round the collection bag. Mark nodded, and the churchwarden, wiping the sweat from his brow, descended the chancel steps like one who has escaped from the middle of a riot.

"It's astounding, isn't it?" Kennedy chuckled to Mark, when they were all back in the sacristy disrobing, "that when the safe party concocts a service additional to the Book of Common Prayer, however safe it may be doctrinally, it is always extremely insecure from every other point of view. I felt while we were wandering about in that aimless C. of E. way as if we were all playing a game of the rules of which nobody was quite sure. I kept expecting old Ashbottom to hold up his hand and shout 'Forfeit!' You ought to have touched the lectern next."

Mark, with what might be described as Mrs. Evans' con-



nivance, had invited all the clergy and their wives to take tea with him at the Hanover Inn, together with the parishioners who had assisted at the Induction. The latter were not numerous. Besides the Evans family there was Annie Pellow and her little girl Winnie, Miss Lambourne of Carwithen, on whom Mark had not yet called, and who was in consequence politely reproachful, and Tom Pascoe, the sexton, whose duties included playing the harmonium, for which he was paid an addition of five pounds a year to his salary as sexton. It would not be too violent a simile to say that Tom Pascoe resembled a hooded cobra with his arched back, his thin wavering legs, his flat colubrine head, and his habit of continually moistening his lips with his tongue. Major Drumgold had interrupted a game of golf to attend the Induction; but as soon as the ceremony was over he hurried out to rejoin Mr. Whittington-Crowe, who was putting, solitary and disconsolate, on the thirteenth green, which was just outside the churchyard gate. Mrs. Drumgold, he explained, was still without servants, and therefore had to her great regret been unable to accompany him.

Kennedy roared with delighted laughter when he saw the black-coated train toiling up Pendhu Hill, some pushing their bicycles, some leading the ponies in the jingles, and followed by a herd of cows that was being driven back from the valley pastures to Pentine farm on the summit of the hill.

"And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth," he quoted, "about six hundred thousand that were on foot, and many children. And a mixed multitude went up also with them, and flocks and herds, even very much cattle."

"Tell me who they all are and where they come from," Mark said.

"Well, you know old Ashbottom."

"Yes," Mark agreed. "I think he's fixed in my mind for ever after this afternoon."

"Who's the funny little man with a sandy beard?"

"That's Goodchild of Polamonter, the next parish along

the coast east of Rose Head. He tries to give an impression of fierceness, but he is really intensely mild and timid. He has secret yearnings to raise, as he calls it, the standard of services, whatever that may mean."

"Who's the dumpy little man walking beside him?"

"That's Tregear of Lanbaddern. Funny old pussy cat with masses of money and a fine church on which he spends immense sums annually."

At the top of Pendhu Hill the procession clustered in a black bunch round Mark, who felt like Moses when he pointed to the scattered white cottages of Nancepean a mile away in the valley and encouraged them by indicating the oasis of the Hanover Inn, a good half-mile nearer.

On the way down Mark found himself walking beside Miss Lambourne.

"I'm sorry," she said, "that you haven't yet been able to spare the time to visit us at Carwithen. My brother Job is very busy on the farm, or he would have accompanied me to the service this afternoon."

Mark looked round at the neat spinster of anywhere between forty and fifty in her neat tailor-made tweeds and stole of grey squirrel. It surprised him to detect underneath her "ladylike" manner of speech a resentment to which Mrs. Evans might have given a more direct expression in dialect, but which would not for that reason have been any more sharply felt. He was glad, however, to be forewarned like this of her character. Had he met her before that jealousy had been aroused, he might have been tempted by the outward signs of intelligence and "superiority" to confide in her too indiscreetly his opinion of other parishioners and his plans for the future.

"Come, Miss Lambourne," he said, "you mustn't be too severe. I've scarcely had time to look round me yet."

"Of course, I realize that Mrs. Evans would do her best to make you comfortable, but we should have been only too glad to look after you at Carwithen until you were settled in at the Vicarage."

"Mrs. Evans has been kindness itself," Mark declared enthusiastically.

Miss Lambourne pursed her lips and said dryly that she was so glad to hear it.

"You're coming to tea at the Inn?" Mark asked.

"Oh no, thank you very much, Mr. Lidderdale, but I must hurry back home. My brother will be expecting me back to get him his tea. I do hope that we shall have the pleasure of seeing you one afternoon at Carwithen."

"Oh, but do come in and help me entertain all these clergymen," Mark begged.

"No, indeed, it is very kind of you," Miss Lambourne replied, "but I must really be getting home. I take this path here. Carwithen lies just beyond over the brow of the hill. You won't forget to pay us a visit? Good afternoon, Mr. Lidderdale."

She turned aside and walked with dignity on the narrow grass path that ran along a stone wall dividing two great fields of stubble.

"Isn't Miss Lambourne coming in to tea, then?" William John Evans asked.

"Don't ask such foolish questions," his wife snapped. "You do know, William John, that Miss Lambourne would die in the road rather than take a cup of tay with we."

"The woman do know she'd be welcome," William John replied.

Mrs. Evans tossed back her head.

"She do know most things. Some do say she do know too much."

"You're coming in to tea, Mrs. Pellow?" Mark asked, hoping thereby to put back the catch of the conversation to safe, and prevent its going off.

"Oh, my dear life, no indeed," Mrs. Pellow exclaimed, blushing deeply at this challenge, for she liked to slip away unnoticed from any gathering that made demands upon her sociability, or involved her animal shyness and self-consciousness in the toils of ceremony. "Come now, Winnie, we must be getting down along so quick as we can. Good afternoon, Mrs. Evans. Good afternoon, Mr. Lidderdale. Come, Winnie, move yourself. The maid is so fat, she do drag anyone's arms from their sockets."

Mrs. Pellow hurried on, Winifred bumping along beside her like a rubber ball.

"'Tis true the woman has the shop to think of," William John admitted.

"She can leave it to look after itself when she's a mind to," Mrs. Evans replied acidly.

So it fell out that the only parishioners present at the tea were the hosts, for even Tom Pascoe had slipped away unnoticed in the wake of Major Drumgold. It was not quite the way Mark had prefigured his first public appearance in Nancepean, but he told himself that one could not expect a large gathering on a week-day afternoon. Much would depend on the impression he made next Sunday at the Harvest Festival. He resigned himself to the entertainment of his fellow clergy.

Mrs. Evans presided over the tea with the help of Dolly Masterman, a fresh-complexioned, pretty young woman, the daughter of a former coastguard who had settled down in Nancepean when his pension was due. It was a real Cornish tea, and that is the best in all the world, with scalded cream and saffron cakes and honey and jam, and meat pasties to support the clergy during the miles between Nancepean and home.

"I hope you'll soon be able to come over and pay me a visit at Lanbaddern," said Mr. Tregear in a voice that exactly resembled an actor's idea of a curate. "I think I may claim that I have made my church one of the most beautiful in England. We proceed with the greatest care and circumspection. I do not allow a stone to be moved without consulting my architect. I shall be glad to offer you lunch, Mr. Lidderdale, whenever you come over. Do you not feel a tremendous draught from that door? If you'll excuse me, I think I'll go and fetch my muffler. Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Kennedy? Do you know that you're sitting right in the draught? Do let me move your chair further round."

"Mr. Tregear is a great lady's man," said Kennedy boisterously.

The Vicar of Lanbaddern tittered like a schoolgirl.



"Oh, what dreadful things your husband does say, Mrs. Kennedy! Have you had any grapes in your garden, Mrs. Kennedy? We expect to cut over six hundred bunches this year at Lanbaddern. Keigwin, my gardener, has been selling them *most* successfully in Rosemarket."

"The old miser takes care not to lose a grape," Kennedy whispered to Mark. "And he's only got a private income of four thousand a year, and no dependants except a parrot. How's your bird, Tregeare?" he asked aloud.

"Oh, Polly's very well, thank you, Kennedy. She learnt a new word last week."

"Not a swear word, I hope."

"Of course not, Kennedy. She could not hear any swear words at Lanbaddern. Keigwin is always most careful. What a suggestion! No, she learnt to say 'Kiss poor Polly!' The new word was 'kiss.' She has been able to say 'Poor Polly!' for several years now."

"She's getting quite a desperate old maid," Kennedy laughed.

"What is that, Kennedy?" the Rural Dean inquired, advancing pompously and, as always, munching the air. Kennedy pretended not to hear, and with an ease remarkable in so fat a man lost himself in the black throng. Nor did Mr. Tregeare pay any attention to Mr. Ashbottom, because Mr. Tregeare liked to be gallant with pretty women, and Mrs. Ashbottom was not pretty.

"I believe you have not yet met Mrs. Ashbottom, Mr. Lidderdale," the Rural Dean said to Mark. She was a small ferret-faced woman with a nose as sharp and red as a pod of chilli. In talking to her Mark felt as if he were stroking a small but dangerous pet. The conversation was not interesting, being mostly about the earliness of the potatoes at St. Marnack, the obstinacy of the natives in the Rhos, and the fullness of Rosemarket on Saturdays. It was mercifully interrupted by Goodchild of Polamonter, who stuck his sandy beard in Mark's face and hoped gruffly that he was a good walker.

"Exercise! And plenty of it!" he barked. "That's the secret! My eldest girl and I walked the whole seven miles

from Polamonter. We shall get a lift half of the way back, but we shall have done our eleven miles by supper time. Dorothy, where are you? We gave you a good Induction, eh, Lidderdale? Dorothy! You'll find us a simple lot after your town clergy. Dorothy! Where is that girl of mine?"

Dorothy, the freckles standing out upon her blushful cheeks like the seeds upon a strawberry, struggled through the black crowd to her father's side.

"You needn't keep on shouting," she murmured resentfully. "Everybody began to look at me."

"She's a big 'un for thirteen, eh, Lidderdale?"

"Oh, shut up, father!"

"We shouldn't have dared answer our fathers like that," Goodchild exclaimed fondly. "All right, my dear, get your coat on. I shall be ready in a moment. Just a word, Lidderdale," he added, in a lower voice. "Go slow in Nancepean. Don't make too many changes at first. You know the proverb, the more haste the less speed. Ah, that's true indeed of Cornwall. Well, we rallied round you well to-day. Up at Bodmin they laugh at us down here in the Rhos. But you'll find that for steady unassuming parochial work we can hold our own."

Mark looked at the phalanx of peninsular clergy, and wondered if he should gradually become absorbed in their ranks, or if like Kennedy he should be able with a laugh to regard them from outside. But then Kennedy had a wife with a sense of humour and three jolly boys. Thus endowed he could preserve his relation to the larger world in just proportion. A fleeting dread passed across Mark's imagination of the future. Were all these clergymen eccentric because they lived in this isolated corner of England, or were they content to live here because they were eccentric?

When Mark stood in the roadway outside the Hanover Inn to bid them all farewell and watched them depart like so many rooks, he remembered the names on those sign-posts: St. Zaver, St. Oo, St. Marnack, Penhallow, Trethinick, Roscarrack, Carveth, and Lanbaddern to the left, and straight on Nancepean, Chypie, Lanyon, Goon Major, Goon Minor, Penaluna, Polamonter, Nanstalon, Rose Head.

Back in the inn, Mark thanked Mrs. Evans for all her kindness and hospitality.

"Ess, I believe they ate well," she said proudly and aloofly.

"Well, I believe," her husband echoed.

"If you was doing your job as you ought to have been doing it, William John, you wouldn't know if they did eat well or ill."

## CHAPTER III

### HARVEST HOME

ST. TUGDUAL'S CHURCH had never been so richly decorated for its Harvest Festival since Archdeacon Denison invented the cultus of St. Pumpkin. Mrs. Evans had made herself responsible for the nave, Miss Lambourne for the chancel, Mrs. Pellow for the font. Mark did not know which deserved the palm for profuse hideousness. The congregation did not know which to admire most. Perhaps the font won the two extreme tributes of disgust and admiration. The base was surrounded by twenty-four vegetable-marrows in attitudes of adoration, above which dusty plumes of pampas-grass concealed the rude stone. A machicolation of Duchess pears ran round the rim, while inside more vegetable-marrows still in attitudes of adoration offered to Almighty God a large pumpkin crowned with a head-dress of black grapes. George Pellow, owing to the failure of Major Drumgold's pumpkin crop, had been compelled to borrow this dropsical gourd from the gardener who had grown it for the harvest festival at Lanyon. Geraniums, wheat, and belladonna lilies provided the decorative scheme for the nave; but the embrasures of the windows were heaped with picotee dahlias, and festoons of scarlet-runner beans made a bower of the roof. The chancel was a feather-bed of white chrysanthemums, and the pulpit was a cornucopia overflowing with cabbages, onions, tomatoes, apples, pears, grapes, Michaelmas daisies, sunflowers, dahlias, and roses.

The congregation was, as Mrs. Evans had prophesied, large. The prospect of passing an opinion upon the new Vicar coupled with the feast of fruit, flowers, and vegetables, had attracted nearly the whole parish. There were Mr. and



Mrs. Henry Martin of Nankervis with their three children, Mr. and Mrs. Fred Stithian of Pentine with their three children and Maud Airey their maid, black Isaac Jago of Roscorla with Mrs. Clemmow his housekeeper, Joe Dunstan of Polgarth, large Mrs. Dunstan and their three brawny sons John Joseph, Harry, and Bob. Old Samuel Dale of Tallack did not come, for Mark had warned his son that he did not intend to close the church on the following Sunday to give his flock an opportunity of browsing on the fruits, flowers, and vegetables of the Harvest Festival in the chapel; but, curiosity being strong in his son and himself, old Sam Dale had sent Woods, his carter, to represent him and report. Miss Lambourne had brought her brother, long Job Lambourne of Carwithen, and, of course, the Pellow and the Evans families were both present. Ernie Hockin, the blacksmith, neither came himself nor allowed any of his family to come. He and they provided the better part of the Reverend Casimir Dale's congregation that morning. Old Masterman and his pretty daughter Dolly were in church. So were the Scobells, who lived in Tintagel, the other wedding-cake villa next to the Casimir Dales, and with them was Miss Horton, their lodger, a lady painter. Mrs. Wilton, the coastguard's wife, was there with two little daughters. So was the whole Tangye family, orange-headed father, flaxen-haired mother, and seven orange-headed or flaxen-haired children. Even Major Drumgold came, and not merely Major Drumgold, but Mrs. Drumgold and Mr. Whittington-Crowe.

"There's the better of seventy men, women, and children," William John Evans told Mark in the sacristy. "I'm beggared if I can call to mind such a congregation in all the days I've been to Nancepean. I wouldn't say as we shan't get over fifteen shillings in the plate." He began to calculate. "Miss Lambourne half-a-crown, Major half-a-crown. Darn'ee," he exclaimed with rising excitement, "I wouldn't say as we won't get over a pound. No such sum was ever known to Nancepean Church unless 'twere in the middle of August and the place packed with visitors who'd money to throw away."

The vestments, furniture, and sacred vessels presented by Drogo Mortemer had all arrived in time for Mark's first Mass in Nancepean Church, and he had already found time to teach Donald Evans how to serve him. There was as yet no choir, or at any rate nothing more than a tendency on the part of Mrs. Evans and Mrs. Fellow to sit in view of Tom Pascoe at the harmonium and shrill forth the hymns chosen by themselves after Miss Lambourne had been invited to contribute a choice and always declined with excessive politeness. Mark had not liked to deprive Nancepean of any opportunity to show off the voice, and since it was impossible until some kind of choir had been got together and Tom Pascoe had had time to study the music to have a sung Mass, he had made no attempt to abolish the singing of Morning Prayer, which was conducted very much as it had been conducted by his predecessor except that it began at half-past ten instead of eleven o'clock, and that when it was over Mark invited all who did not wish to stay to the end of the Communion Service to leave the church at once.

"I want you all to understand clearly," he said, "that Almighty God does not regard the sermons preached in His churches as the most important act of human worship. You no doubt would think it rude to walk out of the church in the middle of my sermon, however dull or stupid or irritating you were finding it. I would ten thousand times rather that you trooped out while I was preaching than that you should insult Almighty God by trooping out in the middle of the service He instituted."

After this he retired to the sacristy to vest himself for the Mass.

"My gosh!" Donald exclaimed, fingering the white silk chasuble. "Some handsome clothes! I never saw such handsome clothes not since the circus come to Rosemarket last Petertide."

"Now don't talk," Mark told him, "and try to remember all you've got to do."

"I shan't forget," Donald said confidently. "I been practising with Arthur Tangye on mother's wash-stand. He said he wished he belonged to be in the choir. He said if you'd

lev him come church and help carry things around he wouldn't never go near the old chapel not if his mother beat 'un for it."

This prospective martyr was aged ten and at this moment sitting in the middle of a long row of brothers and sisters half-way down the aisle. Donald did not bely his self-assurance. He served the priest as if he had done nothing else all his short life, and if the grown-ups were inclined to crane their necks to see what tricks their new Vicar would be at from one moment to another, the children of Nancepean sat in wide-eyed awe under the fascination of Donald's accomplishment.

When Mark took off his chasuble and ascended the pulpit in his alb he felt amid the profusion of flowers and fruits like one of those monstrously substantial fairies that used to emerge from bouquets in the transformation scenes of old-fashioned pantomimes. His embarrassment was not lessened by knocking some half-a-dozen apples off the ledge of the pulpit, whence they went rolling and bumping along the stone-flagged aisle, filling the church with the sweet autumnal perfume released by the bruises they had suffered in their fall.

"My text," Mark began, "is the tenth verse of the first chapter of *Ecclesiastes*:

*Is there anything whereof it may be said, See this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.*

"Many of you sitting here must have said before you left your homes this morning, 'Let us go to church and find out what sort of man this new parson is,' and many of you must have already said to yourselves, 'Such goings on may be all very well up country, but in Cornwall we're simple folk and we don't like novelties, least of all novelties in church.' Now, I'm not saying that this is a bad attitude to take up. We read in *The Acts of the Apostles* how the Athenians came to St. Paul and said to him, 'May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is?' And just afterwards we read that all the Athenians spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing. Well, I prefer your attitude. I like you to feel suspicious

of any novelty in your religion. There is nobody we despise more than the man who is for ever taking up with the latest fashionable craze. We jeer at him as a turncoat and a butterfly. But the way you are worshipping this morning is not new, and your forefathers just over three hundred years ago took up arms to defend this manner of worshipping Almighty God. You say, 'My father and my grandfather and his father before him did this or spoke thus, and for that reason I am not going to change.' But why stop at the example of your great-grandfather? When the Cornishmen took up arms to defend the old faith, and when fifty years later they took up arms again to defend the old dynasty, they were overpowered by superior numbers and were beaten into submission. But they were never satisfied with the religion that was forced upon them. The wonderful success of John Wesley in Cornwall was largely owing to this dissatisfaction, and when Cornishmen flocked to hear him preach the Word of God they were only revolting like their forefathers, but in a different way. I don't expect you immediately to enjoy the services I give you. All I ask you to do is to give them a chance. It would be much pleasanter for me to come back here among you all and continue in the old easy-going way to which you are accustomed. I spent a large portion of my childhood here in Nancepean, and I am not boasting when I claim to know you a little better than a complete stranger might. Believe me, my dear people, it is much harder for me to make up my mind to introduce changes that I know are going to be unpopular than for you to tolerate them. And I have only been able through God's help to find the strength of mind to make these changes. You will often hear people saying that there are so many ways of worshipping Almighty God. Well, I don't believe that. I believe that there is only one way—the way of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, in which, whenever you say the Creeds, you declare yourselves believers. I am not going to try to convince you by arguments that my way of worship is the right way. I don't believe that argument ever convinced anybody about anything. I am simply going to beg you to pray to God in your own way to reveal



to your hearts the Truth of the religion I preach. I know that if you pray humbly and earnestly for Divine guidance God will hear your prayers, and that without any words from me you will believe. That does not mean I shall not try to explain to you the ceremonies that seem so strange at first. I should be a very poor and lazy kind of a priest if I left anything undone that could possibly help you to appreciate the importance of the changes I feel compelled to make. But unless you hear me with open minds, you cannot hope to believe. We all admire the beautiful fruits with which our church is decorated this morning; but it is not enough to offer God pumpkins and marrows and grapes and pears. We must offer Him the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.”

Mark felt that the congregation as a whole had been against him when he began to preach and that nothing he had said so far had done anything to change its attitude. His mind wandered in the arid desert that stretches infinitely, it seems, between a speaker and an audience with which he is out of sympathy. Even from those who wished him well, like William John Evans and his wife, he could not get that positive sense of encouragement which would perhaps enable him to make a dash across the dry and deserted tract of country that cut him off so utterly from his parishioners. William John was sitting with a face like one of those red masks seen in small shop-windows about the fifth of November, Mrs. Evans was stilted and motionless and neutral as a draper's waxen model. Mrs. Pellow was a sphinx. The black eyes of Tom Pascoe glittered snakily over the top of the harmonium. And then Mark caught the eyes of Miss Lambourne where she sat beside her tall bearded brother. He fancied that she was listening to him sympathetically and intelligently, and the imagination of this gushed forth from the barren ground before him like a spring from which he could drink. Thus refreshed he was able to move forward to the conclusion of his sermon.

“Remember, my dear people of Nancepean, that once upon a time this Harvest Festival which now seems to you

so important and so permanent a part of your religious life was a novelty at which your fathers shook their heads in disapproval. It was only invented fifty years ago by a High Church clergyman; and when it first began to be used, it was considered terribly ritualistic and popish. Yet even that was not really new, because years ago at Lammastide the priest blessed the coming harvest. And long, long before that, in the early days of the Israelites and their strangely personal communications with Almighty God, He spake to Moses from the cloud, saying, *Thou shalt observe the feast of weeks, of the first fruits of wheat harvest, and the feast of ingathering at the year's end.* Well, we have observed that feast. All these pumpkins and marrows are the outward signs of our gratitude to God. Remember, however, that God is not content with external signs. When God came down on earth and took on our human flesh, He told us much more about Himself and much more about ourselves than He told Moses and Aaron and Elijah and Isaiah and all His holy prophets. It is right that you should read from the Old Testament, but for every verse of Exodus and Leviticus that you read and quote I wish that you would learn by heart two verses of the Holy Gospels. These pumpkins and marrows, plump though they be and beautifully though they be arranged, are still only pumpkins and marrows. Remember the words of our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ when His disciples bade Him eat:

*My meat is to do the will of Him That sent Me, and to finish His work. Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.*

“The service of Holy Communion or, to use the old-fashioned word for which in days gone by Cornishmen laid down their lives, the Mass, is more important than any Harvest Festival, because it was instituted by God Himself when God moved amongst us as man. I am not asking you to neglect or despise the Old Testament, but I do want you to

realize that the words of our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ mean more to us than the words of God when He spake from out of a cloud unto Moses. Do not go away this morning and think that, because you have come with the pumpkins and the marrows to keep this Harvest Festival, you have thereby fulfilled your religious duty for a year. It is your business to attend and worship at the service instituted by our Blessed Lord. It may be that you will want to criticize the services in this church; but you can only criticize fairly what you understand, and unless you come to church often you cannot hope to understand what is being done. Remember that our dear Lord never promised an easy time to those who wanted to become His followers. If the doctrines and forms and ceremonies of the Church were plain and easy and instantly comprehensible, we should not hear any talk of the failure of Christianity. It is because the Church will not surrender to popular taste that every day she loses some of her children. Remember that you are a part of the Church, or at any rate all of you who have received the sacrament of Holy Baptism in the Church. The Church does not mean an institution apart from yourselves. It is not a kind of secret society which makes special rules for its members, and initiates them into its secrets with fanciful rites and ceremonies. The Church is the visible manifestation of Divine Truth on earth. The Church is the guardian of that Truth. And you are a part of that Church. If you deny the Church, you deny your own Baptism. If you deny the Church, you deny our blessed Saviour. I am saying all this because I do want you clearly to understand that I am not indulging in personal eccentricity by introducing a lot of complicated novelties into the simple atmosphere of Nancepean. I am restoring to this church that which belongs to it. I have on my side the witness of countless holy men and women; I have to sustain me the blood of the Martyrs and the lives of the Saints. In Nancepean we are peculiarly favoured in the position of our church. Yes, I know that it is the habit among you to speak of its distance from the village, and of the inconvenience of its situation down here by the edge of the sea. But what a glorious wit-

ness to Almighty God our little church is! I would not exchange this isolation with the position of any church in Cornwall. When I think of how for centuries this little grey building has stood here through wintry nights of storms, when the foam has whitened the graves and when the very seaweed has been cast up by the waves to strew the graveyard, when I think that never for a moment in summer or in winter is the sound of the sea still, when I think of all those who have prayed here and communed here with God on Sunday mornings, I am overawed, and with deep humility and gratitude I give thanks to our Heavenly Father, because, of His great mercy, He has shown to a poor unworthy priest His power and His glory. Sea surge has changed the contours of the cliffs, golfers have changed the contours of the towans, farmers have changed the contours of the slopes, but through all change the church and its tower have remained where they were built, and by God's protection the gates of Hell have not prevailed against them, nor the fury of the elements, nor even the destructive hands of men."

Once more Mark looked out from the windows of his soul and perceived between him and his congregation an empty desert.

"Ah," he cried, "you are still wrapped up in your Harvest Home. You are still counting the cucumbers and measuring the marrows. Remember the words of St. John in *The Revelation*, when he speaks of that last awe-inspiring Harvest Home:

*And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud One sat like unto the Son of Man, having upon His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle.*

*And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him That sat on the cloud, Thrust in Thy sickle and reap; for the time is come for Thee to reap: for the harvest of the earth is ripe.*

*And He That sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.*

"Think of these words, my dear people, and remember that one day you will lie like pumpkins and marrows and



cucumbers before the throne of God. You will be spread like wheat upon the threshing-floor. And He will gather the wheat into His garner, but the chaff He will burn with fire unquenchable."

Mark left the pulpit, sweeping off with his maniple as he descended what few apples remained. The harmonium struck up *The Sower went forth sowing*. William John Evans, trying to look as impersonal as he could, set out to gather in his crop of small coins. Mark vested himself again in the chasuble and continued the Mass. He wished now that he had not allowed himself to be stung by the apathy or hostility of the congregation into changing the key of his sermon. It had opened with an apology and concluded with an outburst of temper. It had been a deplorable prologue to his work in Nancepean. Mark turned round to receive the alms for the Offertory, while the congregation sang with complacent cheerfulness:

*One day the heavenly Sower  
Shall reap where He hath sown,  
And come again rejoicing,  
And with Him bring His own.  
And then the fan of judgment  
Shall winnow from His floor  
The chaff into the furnace  
That flameth evermore.*

The cheerfulness swelled up even more blatantly.

*O holy, awful Reaper,  
Have mercy in the day  
Thou puttest in Thy sickle,  
And cast us not away.*  
*Amen.*

Mark thought that perhaps after all his parishioners had not been so greatly perturbed by his too violent denunciation. By their singing of the hymn they evidently regarded the prospect of the Day of Judgment with something more than equanimity, even with a positive relish.

Mark did not suppose that his remarks during the sermon kept the congregation from going out after the Offertory. It was rather the defiant emphasis of speech with which he read the prayer for the Church Militant, and the rapidity with which he rushed them into the General Confession. They were caught in the trap of the "Second Service," and there they had to remain until they could depart with the priestly benediction.

The sun was shining brightly when Mark came out into the churchyard and found some of his parishioners whom he had not yet met waiting for him and gazing over the wall while they waited at the flood of the glittering tide across the sands of the cove. Farmers like Henry Martin, Fred Stithian, and Isaac Jago, hot chapel men all three, had shown their disapproval of a service to which they had only come as professionals of agriculture by stalking off with their wives and families to avoid meeting the new Vicar; but without these there were still many parishioners whom Mark had not yet had an opportunity of shaking by the hand. Miss Lambourne presented her brother Job, a tall, shy, bearded, taciturn man from whose attitude the least suggestion of moroseness was removed by the softness of his big brown eyes, downcast and gentle as a woman's.

"How do, how do, how do," he muttered rapidly, and after gripping Mark's hand he strode off like one who has already said too much.

Miss Lambourne, toward whom Mark was still feeling cordial on account of her sympathetic attention in church, apologized for her brother's awkwardness and inelegance.

"But dear me, Mr. Lidderdale," she went on, "I must not monopolize you like this, or I shall be getting black looks from a lot of people. You won't forget to come and see us soon, will you, Mr. Lidderdale? You'll find my brother rather less shy in his own house."

Miss Lambourne with a sweet smile passed on, and Mark turned to greet Mrs. Tangye, thinking with what remarkable ease Miss Lambourne bore herself and how merely by leaving her native village to become a nurse she had acquired

real distinction. He felt quite convinced that Miss Lambourne was going to prove his strongest ally in the parish. The Tangyes were a new family to Nancepean since Mark's childhood. Bill Tangye was a depressed, carroty little labourer on whatever farm in turn called for his services. His wife, fair, voluble, spectacled and feckless, had succeeded in bearing him a family of twelve children in fifteen years, seven of whom had survived. They all lived together in a half-furnished four-roomed cottage, the thatched roof and the walls of which were in a state of leaky disrepair owing to the fact that the last life of the three lives by which it was held was an old woman in Rosemarket verging on eighty. When she died, the cottage would revert to Colonel Greville, the owner of the land. Meanwhile, the present owner, Isaac Jago of Roscorla farm, did not see his way to repair it for the benefit of a man he esteemed less than a distant savage. Bill Tangye earned thirteen shillings and sixpence a week, and in August his two eldest sons, Walter and Jimmie, sometimes earned between them on the links as much as ten shillings a week, but for the rest of the year no more than an odd shilling occasionally. In spite of their limited income and miserable cottage from which they were liable to be evicted as soon as the old woman in Rosemarket died, they were, except for Bill Tangye himself, a cheerful family. The children, most of them orange-headed like their father and subsisting entirely on bread and a jam made from a certain kind of seaweed, were in spite of that the jolliest in Nancepean.

"Good morning, Mrs. Tangye, I scarcely expected to see you in church," Mark said.

"Oh, well, I didn't like not to let the children get the chance to go church for Harvest Home. The Reverend Cass wouldn't have no objection, and boy Arthur and maid Susie was both mad to come. Well, 'tis surely a nice change for them, and 'tis a bit quiet to Nancepean."

Boy Arthur and maid Susie were both beaming up at Mark while their mother was talking, and it struck him that these were the two non-carrotly ones who had probably in-

herited their mother's expansive and amiable zest in existence.

"But have you given up your post at the chapel?" Mark inquired. He was anxious not to let her suppose that he was prepared to buy her attendance, for the opinion of Nancepean expressed severely by Mrs. Evans was that the Tangyes were likely to be church or chapel according to which was likely to feed them next. Their untidy and precarious existence was a general topic among the neighbours in whom the discussion of the poor Tangyes begat a sense of comfort and superiority, as one likes to read by a warm fireside of storm-tossed mariners, or beneath an English lime-tree of pioneers contending with heat and thirst. These discussions were given a practical turn when Mrs. Tangye was appointed official sweeper to the chapel, which meant that every Friday morning Sophie and Susie, her two eldest daughters aged eleven and nine, wrestled inside the chapel with brooms twice as tall as themselves, while their mother in a peaked cap and checkered overall stood in the road and engaged every passing neighbour in conversation about her Saturday visit to Rosemarket. The shilling she was paid every week by the chapel authorities gave Mrs. Tangye a real sense of the power of wealth. When she was talking to the neighbours instead of sweeping out the chapel, she used to say that she had made up her mind to go into Rosemarket tomorrow morning, because really her Walter's boots were a disgrace, and maid Sophie could do with a new pair if it could be managed. But in the evening when Mrs. Tangye alighted from the carrier's cart, she had usually spent the shilling on sweets and bought herself a new hat on credit.

So, when Mark asked if she had given up her post at the chapel, he wanted to make it quite clear to Mrs. Tangye that she was not to expect a more lucrative job from him, and that he was by no means as much delighted to see her in church as to bribe her to come again.

"Oh no, Mr. Lidderdale, I still belong to clean out the chapel. Well, you see, the extra shilling a week do come in very useful. Only last Wednesday—or was it Thursday?—I was saying to Mrs. Wilton I really must buy Jimmie a



new guernsey for the winter. Only they hadn't one to Williams's, and so I was able to buy a little coloured statuette I'd seen the week before. Walter made me a bracket for it, and it made such a difference to the kitchen. It seemed to regular brighten it up."

"I shall come and have a look at it," Mark promised.

Mrs. Tangye blushed.

"Well, to speak truth, it were scat up only this morning. One of the maids took it down to show her little brother Willie. And Willie—yes, you bad boy, it's you I'm talking about to Mr. Lidderdale . . ." Willie, who was three, hid behind the headstone of a tomb . . . "Come off that grave, you naughty boy, if you don't want a ghost to eat you. Yes, Willie put the head in his mouth to suck, and when his sister went to snatch it away it dropped itself on the floor. A pity, wasn't it, Mrs. Wilton? for if I'd known what was going to happen I'm sure I wouldn't have bought it."

Mrs. Wilton, thus brought into the conversation, presented Rosie and Maggie, her two little pink-faced girls, with an apology for her husband's absence from church. It seemed that this was his Sunday for meeting the Lanyon coastguard on the cliffs in the morning.

"I hope you enjoyed the service, Mrs. Wilton," said Mark.

"Oh, I enjoyed what I understood of it," she replied. "Well, really I was brought up a Baptist myself, but Wilton is very strong for church and made quite a point of me bringing the children this morning."

Mark told her that he was looking forward to paying her a visit during the week and turned away to speak to Mr. and Mrs. Scobell. Mr. Scobell was a plump, clean-shaven man, with dark curly hair and a loose mouth. He was prosperous in a small way, and wore a big Albert chain across his convex waistcoat. He had recently bought one of the two wedding-cake villas, much to the disapproval of the more devout Wesleyans who thought that it was terrible for their minister to have a man like Scobell living next door to him, Scobell who always drank too much on Saturdays and very often too much on other days, Scobell who seemed able to laugh at local opinion and drove a trap of his own, Scobell

who actually considered that he was doing Nancepean a favour by living there, Scobell whose language when poor little Wesley Dale, the minister's son, tramped on his geraniums would have been a disgrace even to an Englishman. Everybody said that Scobell lived on his father, who had retired from business and now grew begonias and cinerarias and gloxinias in that pretty little house with cork window-boxes and varnished rustic porch and a greenhouse on either side of it which won the admiration of everybody that drove into Rosemarket from Roseford. Scobell's occupation was indeed rather a mystery. It was alluded to generally as "business," and it involved driving about the countryside in a neat trap and drinking a large amount of whisky. His wife was one of those frail, fretful little women that one so often finds married to fat men, and he had two boys of seven and five, curiously Jewish in appearance, with raspberry-jam mouths and elaborate sailor suits with whistles attached to white cords. Frank and Eddie Scobell had blown these whistles all the way from Nancepean to Church Cove, and without doubt they would blow them all the way back, sowing in the heart of poor Arthur Tangye an envy that was expressed in such a passion of brooding as left him incapable of saying a word.

"Well, there's no doubt you've scared Nancepean," Mr. Scobell announced jovially when he shook Mark's hand. "Fred Stithian never walked up Pendhu hill quicker in his life, I believe."

"Don't listen to Mr. Scobell, Mr. Lidderdale. He always exaggerates so dreadfully. Doesn't he, Mrs. Scobell?"

Mrs. Scobell looked extremely frightened at being thus so abruptly pulled into a conversation on the bank of which she had been shivering. Nor was Mark much less taken aback by what had quite definitely the character of a sudden assault. The speaker was a female painter who had come to Nancepean last April in search of skies, and seemed likely to remain there indefinitely. Her archness with Mr. Scobell found an explanation in the fact that she lodged at Tintagel, the Scobell villa, and considered that her residence made her one of the family, being as she told everybody a thorough

Bohemian. Mark had avoided Miss Horton until now. He had caught several glimpses of her easel upon the cliffs and turned hurriedly in another direction, although he jeered at himself for postponing an encounter which must happen sooner or later, and might just as well happen soon. Miss Horton on this Sunday morning looked rather like a part of the harvest decorations which had been caught up unwittingly by one of the congregation and dragged outside. Her large-brimmed black straw hat was wreathed with poppies, and her green silk dress hung upon her, not in graceful folds as it should, but in the depressions one may see in a field of hay-grass beaten down by heavy rains. Her very cheeks, no doubt once rosy and bloomed with youth, had now the fierce colour and more naked texture of a poppy, and the artificial black added to her eyes had the same fierce black as poppy pollen. The comparison was so vivid in Mark's mind that he actually found himself saying:

"How d'ye do, Miss Shirley?"

Miss Horton, however, was not at all upset by this.

"I loved your sermon, Mr. Lidderdale," she gushed. "Indeed I loved the whole service. So don't listen to a word Mr. Scobell says."

"Miss Horton's an artist," Scobell replied. "All very well for her, but we aren't all of us artists. Not that I'm against your style of services myself. But most of the people round here haven't knocked around like I have."

Mrs. Scobell was beginning to assume dutifully the expression of the regular listener, and it struck Mark that her change of countenance was the microcosm of a congregation's united attitude when the preacher invokes the Holy Trinity before his sermon. But Miss Horton was not going to let Mr. Scobell become reminiscent.

"I hope you did not mind my bringing my dog to church, Mr. Lidderdale. He's *such* a dear old thing, and he lies in the porch as quiet as a lamb."

The collie thus flattered barked with the monotonous and hollow insistence that so unpleasantly distinguishes a collie from all other large dogs and impairs its reputation for

sagacity as the reputation of a great scientist or historian may be impaired by his boring talk in a club smoking-room.

"Quiet, Rover! Quiet! Good old boy, not so much noise! Good old fellow!"

Mark took advantage of the extra noise made by Rover in response to his mistress's demand for silence to turn and greet Major Drumgold, who was emerging mysteriously from a conversation with the Pellows.

"It won't do, old chap," he said hoarsely to his vicar. "You've frightened 'em. By Jove, old boy, they're frightened. George Pellow—capital fellow, George! George didn't know where he was. He was bunkered by the ritual right off. So was Tom Pascoe—fine fellow, Tom! Tom foozled every hymn. I never heard him play like that before. Well, it upset Whittington-Crowe. You know who I mean? You met him up at my place last week. Whittington-Crowe said it reminded him of a service he attended by accident once in Dieppe. You know what I mean? Don't be offended if I speak out plain."

"Not at all," Mark said.

"Then give it up, old chap. I know the Cornishman. You know what I mean? I know him. And he's very conservative. All this High Church business might go down well up country, but not here, old boy, not here. Not in Nancepean. It's exotic. That's the word. Exotic."

"But you don't object to exotic plants, Major."

The Major ignored the interruption.

"What I mean to say is," he went on, "they're used to hearing what's being said by the parson. They couldn't understand a word of what you said. Some of it might have been Latin for all I heard of it."

"Some of it was Latin," Mark admitted coolly.

"You don't mean to say that you were praying in Latin? Great Scott! It'll cause a hue and a cry, old boy. It will really. A regular hue and a cry."

"But you don't object to giving plants Latin names," Mark said.

"Yes, I do. I object strongly. I think it's idiotic. I'm always forgetting what my plants are called. And it's simply



because they won't give them decent English names. Suppose we used Latin for golf?"

"The language you do use is just as unintelligible as Latin to ordinary men," Mark pointed out. "And it's certainly twice as ugly."

"Well, I'll argue it out with you some other day," the Major went on. "I must hurry back and help Topsy with the dinner. Two confounded girls ought to have come out last night by the Rosemarket bus, but they never turned up. By the way, old chap, Topsy didn't stop to say how d'ye do. She's walked on with Whittington-Crowe. To tell the truth, she was a bit upset by the service. It gave her a shock. You know what I mean? She's got a deep religious streak, and it gave her a shock."

The Major hurried away to overtake his wife, and Mark climbed up into the Evans trap to drive back to the Hanover Inn.

All the way up Pendhu hill William John Evans leant over the reins in moody silence, until his wife in exasperation demanded the reason for such behaviour.

"For dear life's sake, William John, how don't 'ee say something? It do give anyone the fidgets to see a man sit so awkward and bent up like a little old woman. My goodness, I'm ashamed for 'ee! If I'd known you was going to be so stiff I'd have walked up with Donald and left 'ee to drive home along by yourself."

Just then they reached the brow of the hill and caught the fresh breeze blowing in from the bay. William John roused himself from his lethargy of gloom and, turning round, bellowed above the wind in Mark's ear:

"I was sucked in over the collection. It were under the pound."

Mark nodded to show that he had heard, but could not think of any comment that it would have been worth while to make audible above the wind. Balfour lowered his head and trotted so fast down the hill towards his stable that the occupants of the trap were too much engaged in avoiding being thrown out to bother about conversation. At dinner,

however, William John returned to the subject of the collection, the pooriness of which was still galling him.

"I made sure we should have had a couple of pounds," he said. "I was never more sucked in in all my life."

Mrs. Evans screwed up her eyes in withering disapproval. "If I were churchwarden, I'd be ashamed to talk so," she declared.

"'Twas the service as done it," said her husband. "Fred Stithian put in a penny, and Isaac Jago never put in nothing at all, and when Grace Martin were going to put in a thrupenny bit Henry Martin snatched it away from her, and the maid coloured up like fire. Major put in half a crown, but he shook his head at me when he done it, and I could see he were mad. And when I offered the bag to Tom Pascoe, who always belongs to put in a penny for Harvest Home, he only grinned and thumped the harmonium. I asked him afterwards how he didn't put in his penny the same as he belonged, and he told me he'd sooner spend his money to see the circus to Rosemarket."

"Tom Pascoe!" Mrs. Evans scoffed passionately. "If I was Vicar of Nancepean I'd see Tom Pascoe rotting in one of his mean ordinary graves before ever I'd leave him play the harmonium to my church. Things will have come to a pretty pass when Nancepean church do live by Tom Pascoe's pennies. My dear life, I'd like for him to have spoke to me about circuses. I'd soon have told him sharp that any circus 'ud be glad to give him more than five pounds a year to wheel him round in a cage."

"Well, you can say what you've a mind," the churchwarden insisted, "but 'tis no use to say one thing and mean another, and if I didn't tell Mr. Lidderdale such services as his would never take down here, why, I wouldn't be acting fair by the man."

"What was the matter with the service?" Mark asked with a smile.

"What were the matter with it?" William John repeated. "What weren't the matter with it? Why, the Pope of Rome couldn't have done worse."

"What ignorance and nonsense you do talk, William

John," his wife broke in. "As if you'd know the Pope of Rome when you saw him! 'Tis surely making yourself more foolish than you need to talk so light."

Mark did not delude himself into supposing that he had converted Mrs. Evans to Catholicism; but he saw no reason why contrariness should not serve as a channel for grace. The doctrines and the ceremonies that were the symbols of his belief were always irresistible if only people would not harden their hearts against them and refuse them patient consideration. Moreover, deep down in Mrs. Evans' heart there must be a wellspring of romance which had flowed up to the surface when she had her only child christened Donald. It might surely happen that now for the first time her soul would have an opportunity to expand. Her sharpness and angularity were the expression of a hatred for commonplace existence. She was like one of those plants that flower and seed in desperation on poor and unpropitious soil, though their form may be distorted and their leaves too early sere. It did not strike him as absurd to hope that the prospect of endless adventures for the soul would reveal itself to her in the faith preached at St. Tugdual's, nor too optimistic to believe that she would lose much of the sharpness and angularity in the wide vistas of eternity that might open to her passionate and resentful gaze. In any case Mark was assured of her son's devotion, and through him of gaining the devotion of many of his youthful companions. After dinner he and Donald scrambled down to the cove below the inn and sat on cushions of thrift watching the chariots of the sea race up the swift-sloping beach. Westward over St. Levan's Bay the puffed-out white clouds seemed to be blowing the breeze before them instead of being, as they were, themselves at its mercy.

"Did I do fitty this morning, Mr. Lidderdale?" Donald inquired.

Mark praised with enthusiasm his care and accuracy.

"I wasn't too sure once or twice," Donald admitted in a retrospective memory of his achievement. "I felt a bit hurried once or twice, and when I were pouring the water over your fingers I nigh almost dripped the cruet. Funny

thing, but when I were serving I never felt nothing in my knee all the time."

It was a temptation to claim a miracle worked by Donald's faith, but Mark resisted it.

"That's because you were so tremendously concentrated on doing everything right," he said.

"Do you think my leg will ever be quite well? It don't hurt now like it belonged."

"Of course it will be quite well one day," Mark assured him.

"It makes I mad sometimes," Donald confessed. "And Mum won't lev me use it so much as I've a mind to. She boxed my ears last night because I jumped on a chair to put on the clock. 'Darn 'ee,' I said, 'you make enough trouble about me hurting my old knee, but you don't mind boxing my ears.'" Then in a sudden apprehension of disloyalty to his mother, he went on quickly: "Boy Arthur said again he'd give anything if you'd lev him help down church. He reckoned to me that if he could wear a surplice on Sundays he'd do his work better for teacher. And when maid Susie laughed at 'un and said he could have her petticoats if he'd a mind, Arthur pushed her over a tombstone."

"Well, I'm going to start a Sunday-school soon," Mark said. "And if Arthur Tangye wants to come I shall be only too glad to see him there."

"I reckon that'll be grand," said Donald. "I hope his mother'll lev him come. She mightn't. In case she lost her shilling a week from the chapel."

There was a very small congregation indeed for evensong of that Sunday, and Mark could not deceive himself into supposing that its smallness was due to the rising of the wind at twilight, which by church time had been blowing half a gale. There were not even oil lamps in St. Tugdual's, and it had long been the custom for the housewives of the flock to take turns to provide candles for the service. These were stuck on the ledges of the pews, whence they cast huge hovering shadows of the worshippers upon the roof. This evening the decorations of the Harvest Festival touched with a more extravagant phantasy the penumbral scene, and the



hardly discernible shapes of beans and cucumbers might have been goblin fruit to lure the unwary to hell. When Mark ascended the pulpit and looked down at Miss Lambourne and Mrs. Evans and Mrs. Pellow, each lighted by her candle, each appearing to him as might a shining world to God, and each being to God not less than the whole of a shining world, he was filled with desire that they should swing onward through time towards eternity, harmonious as the spheres. If only these three women would work together for the glory of God, what in Nancepean could withstand them?

Mark took the text for his sermon that night from *The Song of Solomon*:

*Love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave.*

## CHAPTER IV

### THE VICARAGE

MARK made haste to move into the Vicarage early in the week after the Harvest Festival. He took this step partly to preserve Miss Lambourne and Mrs. Pellow from the bane of jealousy with which his exclusive dependence upon the services of Mrs. Evans would certainly afflict them, partly because for personal reasons he was glad of an excuse to withdraw for awhile from the centre of village life. He was only too well aware how much he had prejudiced his future as vicar of Nancepean by that inauspicious Sunday morning, and he found the hearty self-satisfaction of Cass Dale almost unendurable.

"You made a big mistake, Lidderdale," said the minister, who had buttonholed Mark on his way up to consult Mrs. Pellow about provisions for the Vicarage. "Yes, you properly frightened them. I suppose, as head of the other party, I ought to be glad. But I wish you well, Lidderdale, for old sake's sake. Remember when I stood you on your head in a furze bush, eh? Ha, ha, ha! I've laughed over it once or twice since you came back."

"Yes, I remember," Mark said sharply. "And do you remember when you were afraid to walk up Pendhu hill by yourself, because you thought your grandfather's ghost was watching for you by the churchyard gate?"

"Well, I wasn't used to the church when I was a kid," said Cass, who flushed as deeply as ever he did at a joke against himself. "No, as I was saying, I wish you well, Lidderdale, and if you'll condescend to take a bit of advice from a benighted nonconformist, I'll give it to you and welcome. Go slow, that's my advice. You'll never drive a Cornishman. Why, if you went on as you began you'd

empty a full church; but you've got to fill an empty one. Mind you, I don't think you'll ever do that, whatever you give them in the way of services. But you'd get the people along occasionally, and you'd never find me bitter. We were friends as boys together, and I'm not going to forget that. But if I was to get up in my pulpit and beg my flock to give you a chance now and again, they wouldn't listen to me so long as you pitch all that High Church. . . . Well, I believe you're sincere, and so I won't use the word I was going to use. Honestly, Lidderdale, I hate to see you flinging away your own chances, even though it is all to my advantage that you should. Well, so long! Come in and have tea with us one day soon. The missus hasn't met you yet, and she's looking forward to the treat. We don't see much society here." Cass grinned.

When Mark moved into the Vicarage he continued to take his meals at the Hanover Inn, and Mrs. Evans insisted on coming every morning to make his bed. Feeling that this was likely to create as much jealousy as living at the inn altogether, he looked round for a suitable housekeeper. At first he contemplated inviting the Tangye family to remove themselves from the tumble-down cottage where they lived and take up their abode in the Vicarage. On second thoughts he decided that such an invitation would savour too much of bribing a whole congregation. Moreover, such a crowd would really be beyond his means. In the end he discovered a family even more consistently ne'er-do-well than the Tangyes, one of those families that are found on the outskirts of every village in every country. They are often notorious evil-doers, and in England their lawlessness usually takes the shape of poaching or, in a district like Nancepean, where no game is preserved and the land is divided up into small farms, of robbing their neighbours' hen-roosts. Such families, like the Jewish scapegoat, play an ambiguous part in the service of morality, for they are the cause of exceeding self-righteousness among neighbours who from the superior altitude of prosperity and respectability are apt to forget that petty thieving is not the only sin.

The ne'er-do-well family of Mark's adoption lived in a

cottage even more ruinous than the Tangyes', at the foot of one of the furze-covered slopes of the valley down which his path lay from Nancepean to the Vicarage. Like the Tangyes' cottage, this was held on the tenure of three lives, the last of which in this case was Aunt Penelope Prawle—Penelope was pronounced in three syllables, and on account of the "Pen" considered a good old Cornish name—who was a hale, active, hairy-faced old woman of sixty-five, with the muscles of an ox and the hindquarters of a sow. Her personality alone would have given this barren matriarch the chief position in the household without the additional importance conferred upon her by the fact that the whole family depended for the roof above their heads upon her life. In moments of extreme wrath she had been heard to threaten that she would drown herself in the diminutive stream that flowed along the valley at the foot of the cottage garden, and by such a drastic move put every one of her nephews and nieces on the parish. It would have been as easy for a hippopotamus to drown itself in such a stream as for Aunt Penelope; but she was known to be a woman of such unrestrained determination that the threat was accepted as serious. The rest of the family consisted of Albert Prawle, the grandson of an elder brother long dead, his wife Jennifer, their two children, Lily and Dick, aged nine and seven, and Toby Prawle, an unmarried nephew of fifty. Albert Prawle was a weak little man with straggly fawn-coloured moustaches and pink cheeks, who was carter to Isaac Jago, of Roscorla. His wife had the shining, highly coloured complexion and stupid staring eyes that one sees in crudely painted puppets. Her movements, too, were wooden, and she possessed a natural ability to evoke squalor in the most favourable circumstances and amid the most beautiful surroundings. To watch her at work in her own yard was to watch a moulting fowl listlessly scratching in the garbage of a refuse-heap. Lily and Dick were not more interesting than was to be expected from the offspring of such a couple; but Toby Prawle, their uncle, had personality, although he was as great a rogue as any between Land's End and the Tamar. Toby Prawle from earliest childhood had been



successful in avoiding any attempt to educate him, and in the whole of his life he had never had a regular job. He had contrived to reach his jubilee by occasional luck with what he found washed up on the beaches, by stealing poultry, by robbing wrecks (which might have been included in the luck of the beach), and since the opening of the links by finding and selling lost golf balls. In winter he snared wild-fowl on the cliffs with fish-hooks. He bred ferrets in quantity, and was made use of by the farmers to destroy the foxes and the badgers that infested a district where the huntsman's horn was never heard. When he managed to kill a fox he would carry it round in a sack from farm to farm and collect a tribute of sixpence from each farmer in turn. He was a small, shifty-eyed, predatory creature, as slim and agile as a polecat, and with only two passions that distinguished him from the predatory creatures of the fields. One of these was his habit of walking into Rosemarket every Saturday and there getting completely drunk, after which he would always have a long story on Sunday for the neighbours of his adventures on the way home with piskies who had led him over hill and over dale until he had either been stagged in the moors or plunged head downwards in the Rose Pool. It was a strange tribute to the magic of alcohol that such a fellow's tipsy dreams should take him into fairy-land. Toby's other passion was a kind of lubricious curiosity that drove him at the shutting in of dusk to sneak round the cottages of Nancepean and surreptitiously peep in at the golden interiors revealed through cracks in the blinds and curtains. One would often meet the little man padding along in the dark and chuckling to himself at the memory of some rich sight vouchsafed to his interminable and patient inquisitiveness, just as one would often meet him by daylight padding along the beaches and chuckling at the thought of some treasure found and safely stored away in his pocket.

This was the family that, in spite of the fierce protests of Mrs. Evans, Mark engaged to look after him at the Vicarage. He did not flinch from the obvious truth that by paying this family to gratify his domestic requirements he was paying them to worship Almighty God in the way he thought

right. Still, in securing their attendance at Mass every Sunday morning he was not interfering with the claims of a rival, as he would have been by employing the Tangyes on the same terms. If the Prawles did not hear Mass on Sunday morning in church they would not have been more likely on that account to listen to the sermons of the Reverend Casimir Dale in chapel. Mark argued with himself that in this case bribery was justifiable, because there was at least a chance of conversion from nothing to something. It was not bribing people to believe. That would have been self-evident folly. It was bribing people to give themselves an opportunity of believing. Moreover, Albert Prawle himself was still Isaac Jago's carter, and it was up to that bitter and bigoted man to threaten him with the loss of his job if he surrendered to the wiles of Popery. The farmer was not likely to do that, for Albert was a good carter, considerate and capable with the horses and not afraid of work, a man who, with the right kind of wife, might have raised himself above his relations. In fact, the more Mark saw of Albert the more highly he esteemed him, and he began to persuade himself that Albert's dullness was a kind of moral protest against the greedy cunning of the others. Mark did not flatter himself that he had cured Toby Prawle of even the worst of his drunkenness because by insisting on his attendance at Mass every Sunday morning he had made that old hopeless intoxication of Saturday night an impossibility. Mrs. Evans soon made it clear to him that Toby's abstinence was not the result of his priestly persuasion. The toper had been converted by the vigour with which Aunt Penelope had laid into him with a rolling-pin and with apostolic blows taught him not to imperil the family fortune by his behaviour. Mrs. Evans added, for Mark's information, that Toby had merely changed his time-table and now got drunk every Wednesday night instead, which he counted a grievance against the Lord in that it interfered with his Thursday scavenging along the beaches and deprived him of a day's earnings. Aunt Penelope was extremely anxious that the whole family should take up its abode in the Vicarage, and she would often bemoan to Mark the frailty of her life. But on this point he

was firm, and bought the family two lanterns instead, so that what the old lady claimed was the dangerous journey between the Vicarage and the cottage might be performed in safety even on moonless winter nights. Aunt Penelope fought hard for the lodging she coveted, from time to time thrusting her face right into his and offering hoarsely to move all their furniture from the cottage, even if she had to carry it stick by stick on her own back. Mark did not relish these arguments at such close contact with Aunt Penelope, who in her eagerness to have her way seemed likely at any moment to bite off his lower jaw and thus put an end to his arguing the point any longer. Mark knew that furniture. He had not only seen it, but he had smelt it, and he held out against the transportation. He might have tolerated Albert's half of the family, but the prospect of Aunt Penelope's relentless tongue and the prospect of Toby's ferrets and sly noctambulant excursions were more than he could face.

So every evening, when Jennifer and Aunt Penelope had at last finished with the quack and clatter of washing up the clomb, the Vicarage took on a tremendous silence. There were very few rooms furnished, and even of these Mark had wanted to combine dining-room and study in one room. Mrs. Evans, however, had insisted so strongly on the lack of dignity that such an arrangement would convey to the imagination of his parishioners that Mark had given way and agreed to buy a painted yellow sideboard, and a table of imitation mahogany round which six chairs waited like a skeleton committee. His grandfather's old study, where Mark had learned Latin, was now his own study, a comfortable and spacious room furnished with a couple of large, low wicker chairs and three or four hundred well-read books. Mark could not afford to have it redecorated, which was a pity, because the grey wallpaper was a dishevelled bower of dingy foliage in which the oriental concepts of his predecessor still roosted. Alas! there was a great deal less left of old Parson Trehawke than of the Reverend John Jacob Morse, whose concentration upon the whereabouts of the lost tribes of Israel over a space of twenty years had obliterated the personality of the scholarly old naturalist. The

shadow of a savage tribal god haunted the recesses; turbans and gabardines, hooked noses and pendulous underlips, the odour of stale manna, patriarchs, palm trees, and levitical prohibitions clung to it, and even the cracked plaster beside the window, owing to the invasion of a swarm of bees, flowed with honey like the land of Canaan. At St. Cyprian's Cyril Nash had invented a game of rhymes about absurd animals and birds such as the kangarooraldean or the omnibustard, of which Mark remembered two lines about a fabulous monster called the antimacassowary:

*Which sits in corners of the room,  
Shedding an atmosphere of gloom.*

He wondered how long it would be before he should be able to drive the creature forth.

Upstairs Mark had furnished for himself the little bedroom in which he had slept as a child, and for the friends whose visits he had planned to enjoy in the summer time he had made of his mother's old room next door a scantily furnished spare room. The rest of the ancient house was a desert of hollow-sounding caves, round which Mark would sometimes make a nocturnal pilgrimage, candle in hand, retiring at last in a deliberately engendered luxury of breathless relief to his study, where, in spite of the antimacassowary, he would find a comparatively jolly atmosphere. Huddled over the fire, he would waste an hour bewitched by the mental contemplation of those empty rooms that existed upstairs and downstairs in motionless rows, each one in its mournful sameness like the next, each one conversing with itself now in lisps and whispers, now in sighs and moans, according as the wind gave it voice, each one suffering from a complete annihilation of itself as an active personality, yet each one by that very annihilation of personality achieving the positive and naked impact of personality that is achieved by a ghost. Mark would sometimes strain his ears in affright when an unheralded gust of wind gave him the notion that a door had blown open. There was not anybody nor anything that would emerge; but the



thought of one of those doors remaining open all through the night was the fancy of a malignant effluence of emptiness set loose to steal like a miasma along the corridors, to wreath the balusters with invisible fumes, to flow out slyly and ceaselessly all through the long night and suffocate with nothing the mind, the heart, the very soul of the solitary human inhabitant. In such moods at such times Mark longed for music, as in the Middle Ages bells were rung to frighten devils. He tried to find in poetry a refuge from the invading emptiness, but the poet's world was not as remote and romantic and inaccessible as the world of ordinary life. The noise of motors to his mind's ear was as thrilling as the dulcimer of an Abyssinian maid or the song of that Highland reaper.

Filled with a poetical imagination of London, he set his hand to making verses about the evoked emotion; but when they were written down they sounded like the sentimentalities of the music-hall; and as a poet adds to his renown by dying young, Mark's verses earned a brief apotheosis by flaring up from the embers of the dying fire. From poetry Mark turned to mystical theology, without any more success. In the commonplace of a crowded city mysticism gains much by contrast. Down here in this lonely house and lonely corner of England the pursuit of mysticism aggravated his isolation. He seemed unable to gain anything more consoling from his study of mystical experience than the impression of various other overwrought contemplatives struggling on through their earthly pilgrimage, always a prey to their sense of utter abandonment by God.

Anybody who lives alone is apt to resort to a less civilized mode of life. The first temptation is not to shave regularly. If this be succumbed to, regression into barbarous habits of behaviour is steady and swift. Presumably, if a man could live long enough in solitude he would gradually get back to his father the ape. Mark did not begin to neglect his shaving, and outwardly he still conformed as rigidly to the habits of civilization as if he were still a curate in a fashionable London parish. He did, however, detect in himself a tendency to revert to an earlier attitude of mind. He

tried to pretend at first that this was a laudable release of himself from the shackles of sophistication, and that he was discovering in Nancepean the way to a truer and simpler life. But soon he perceived that he was travelling back mentally in the direction of his youth. The terror of place which he had felt so acutely on his first night at the Hanover Inn increased rather than diminished. He ascribed this partly to finding himself alone after a long interval of absence in the environment of his earliest acute impressions. It was significant that he fell a victim once more to a childish nightmare which had formerly recurred periodically. This was to find himself toward twilight lost in the middle of the desolate interior of the Rhos peninsula, knowing that as soon as it was dark the stones which seemed to browse among the heather like huge placid beasts would acquire the power of movement and molest him. He would start to flee from them, all the strength running from his limbs like water from a sieve, until at last, panting and shrieking from the strain of that thunderous pursuit, he would somehow gain the Vicarage, and even as he slammed the door behind him know that the questing stones would pass through and fill the house. Sometimes he would wake in a sweat before the first megalith had burst open the door, sometimes he could not wake up until some elephantine lump of granite had pounded up the stairs and reached the door of his own room.

Mark did not attempt to seek an interpretation of this dream. He ascribed it to the reaction in solitude to his strenuous life as a curate. He had no doubt that the explanation was to be found in a nervous condition, and that it was similar to the delusions that accompany fever. Yet he could not avoid speculating if the human mind in such moments of intensified though misdirected mental energy might not be more capable of recognizing the substance of reality. It was a commonplace of biology that the individual after a prenatal compendium of evolution from protoplasm to man spent his postnatal existence in achieving within the limits of his breeding a compendium of human development. It was attractively easy to explain away the fears and horrors

of childhood by pointing out an analogous attitude toward nature in the savage, but was it the right explanation? Was it so absolutely certain that the peasant who suffered from what the educated observer would call an unreasonable fear at twilight of the very air he breathed was unreasonable? Might he not be better able to recognize the substance of the twilight's reality than the educated observer whose perceptions had become clogged by an accumulation of experience that was often more partially assimilated than he supposed, as much better able to do this as to read the weather in the sky without the help of a barometer? And might not his own unreasonable terrors, which it was so attractively easy to explain by loneliness working on already overwrought nerves, be his soul's apprehension of the powers of evil that were gathering to contest his fight for Nancepean?

## CHAPTER V

### FOUR LETTERS

MARK did not spend all his time in frightening himself with bogies, as some of his letters written during that autumn will show.

The first was to his late Vicar, the Reverend Drogo Mortemer:

My dear Mortemer,

It was really good of you to write me such a long and amusing letter when you're so busy, and as for your offer to present a stone altar to my church I'm left without words to thank you enough. I'm afraid that I cadged it, though I hadn't the courage to ask for it directly. Stephen Crutchley, of course, will be just the man for the design. I'll send him the measurements of the church at once and also a photograph of the chancel as soon as I can get a fellow out from Rosemarket. I'm already losing touch with London and can't for the life of me be sure whether Crutchley's offices are in Staple Inn. I feel sure that they are, but you might send me his address on a postcard. I suppose if I wait for a faculty it will be months before we get the altar in its place. I don't fancy that there will be any opposition, but if there were, the Chancellor would refuse it, so I think I'll put it in without a faculty, and in the event of objections trust to the difficulty of removing such a weighty affair. This stone altar must have been very much in my mind lately, for I have been having queer dreams of being pursued across waste places by troops of angry granite boulders.

You ask how I am getting on. Not very brilliantly, I'm afraid. The people are friendly and pleasant enough on the surface; but they certainly do not like the Catholic religion.



Of course, I have given them a strong dose of it, and yet I don't believe that they would have made any less fuss if I had tried a gradual inoculation. Moreover, although it is generally reputed that I have emptied the church, I cannot find that the regular congregation was any larger in the time of my predecessor. No doubt by the courtesy of the opposition he was able to muster a better showing on the supreme festivals of the Christian year, like New Year's Day and Harvest Home, but normally he had no more souls than I have. By the way, talking of my predecessor, I think I've already told you that the ambition of his life was to identify the British nation with the lost tribes of Israel. The other day I was emptying the stables at the back of the Vicarage and climbed up through a trap-door into an old loft, in a back corner of which I found a large stack of pamphlets tied up in parcels of fifty. Masses of them left in spite of the rats and mice having apparently subsisted on them for years. I thought at first that I might have stumbled upon a collection, but every bundle was made up of the same pamphlets. It's scarcely credible, but this is what it was: "When was Circumcision Lost in Great Britain? By the Reverend John Jacob Morse, M.A., sometime Postmaster of Merton College, Oxford." I'm sending you one under separate cover. I suppose the publisher protested at having to house them any longer, and that poor old Morse, unwilling to destroy what was apparently his only contribution to literature—his magnum opus was never finished—fed the rats with these poor bantlings of his pen. It's a queer thing to live in this big, empty, desolate and remote house all by myself and ponder upon a predecessor that spent twenty years in meditating such problems. The children here tell me that he was in the habit of measuring their noses for traces of Judaic origin. I wonder what fad I shall evolve out of this isolation? My Vicarage would make fine headquarters for a spiritualist. You never heard such rappings and tappings and sighings and breathings. Once more my deepest thanks for your gift of the altar. Whatever else I leave of myself in Nancepean (I hope it won't be a rat-eaten

bundle of pamphlets) I shall at any rate leave a solid memorial to your goodness and generosity.

Yours ever,  
Mark Lidderdale.

The second letter was to the Reverend Michael Heriot, Senior Curate at St. Cyprian's, South Kensington:

My dear Heriot,

I daresay Mortemer has told you that he is presenting a stone altar to my church. Will you occupy yourself with procuring for me the relics of a martyr? I believe I am right in thinking that nowadays one is considered enough; but you will correct me if I am wrong. I miss your Duchesne. Crutchley is going to design it, and I wish you'd go into the question of the sepulchrum. It will have to be lined with lead. We cannot run to a more precious metal here. One more request. I find that the Cathedral of Tréguier has several bones of St. Tugdual, our patron saint. Do try on your next trip to Brittany to procure for me the smallest fragment of a bone. I don't suppose you would get the Cathedral authorities to part, but there are probably other relics of the saint in the district, and you might be able to secure a knuckle.

I think you are wise to turn your face against all preferment. I find that as a beneficed priest I am now beginning to ask myself if I have any business in the Church of England. Mind you come and stay with me for awhile in the summer. I shall need cheering up.

Yours ever,  
Mark Lidderdale.

The third letter was to the Rector of Wych-on-the-Wold:

My dear Rector,

I ought to have written weeks ago and told you how I was getting on in Nancepean. I daresay that I should have done so if I had felt any assurance that I was making the least progress. The trouble is that I'm not. I wonder, when you first went to Meade Cantorum, if you felt like a missionary

who had landed on the wrong island by mistake, for that is what I feel like, and I'm half inclined to resign my living and go away and try to convert some genuine heathen. I should like to know that if I failed I should be roasted and eaten. This does not arise from any morbid desire for martyrdom, but one does writhe under the suggestion that one is the victim of self-indulgence. That really is the attitude of the average man towards us. It didn't seem to matter when I was a curate. In fact it always seemed rather fun to shock people. But one grows out of that, and like a man who "settles down" and gets married one gets irritated at being supposed to be still the prey of youthful indiscretions.

Apart from all that, I'm beginning to ask myself if these people haven't got the religion they want. To me it seems more remote from Christianity than Mahommedanism, but no doubt to them my Christianity seems as remote as Buddhism. By the way has anybody ever called Mahommedans the Protestants of the East? I know that superficial resemblances between Catholicism and Buddhism have been remarked often enough. I daresay that I shall be able to get the children, but shall I keep them when they grow up? The Cornish have taken to a debased form of Wesleyanism like ducks to dirty water. One ought to be able to find out just what it is that attracts them and bring out that aspect of Catholicism, for if Catholicism is what we think it is it must contain everything that Wesleyanism can offer. I see the attraction of Wesleyanism for the farmers, who are nearly all local preachers and like to hear their own voices, but I'm bothered if I can understand why the rest of the people should want to listen to them. It's not that the local preachers spout more intelligently. Most of them are hopelessly inexpressive and dull. I wonder if the priests were taken from the people as in Ireland whether that would wean them from Wesleyanism? And then I ask myself what is the power of teetotalism over them. Why should the Band of Hope knit them more closely together than some Catholic fraternity? They have not had any terrible experiences down here of the evils of drink. I think it must be that

they really don't require alcohol. The climate is so much kindlier than over most of England. It would be fun to divert the Gulf Stream and see how long teetotalism remained the ruling passion. Perhaps I shall write more optimistically when I have my Sunday School in full swing. At present beyond saying Mass to half-a-dozen people on Sundays and to empty pews on week-days I do nothing to earn my ninety pounds a year. I said empty pews on week-days, but alas, since All Souls' Day, when after the requiem we flung flowers into the sea to tend the graves of the drowned, a lady painter has taken to appearing. She insists that I have converted her, which is embarrassing, because I'm sure that the village imagines that I have been making love to her. Miss Horton—that is her name—is a real trial. I feel terribly at her mercy and wish that she would revert to the paganism from which she goes about boasting that I have rescued her. What is to be done with these impossible predatory women who nowadays roam the country like the wild beasts of the past? What do you think she said to me after Mass this morning? "Mr. Lidderdale, I came to Nancepean in search of skies, but I did not know that I should find Heaven!" I muttered something about my breakfast getting cold and fled. I shall really have to take up golf. I fancy that by steady practice one should be able to kill at forty yards. Well, I mustn't wander on any longer, but go to bed. Love to all at Wych. I hope that I shall be visited by some of you next summer. I have fourteen spare rooms at the Vicarage, but only one is furnished.

Your ever affectionate,

M. L.

The fourth letter was to Pauline Grey:

Dearest Pauline,

Perhaps if I try to give you an idea of my parish and parishioners it will help me to get my own ideas about them in some kind of order. At present you could knock me down on a feather, as old Mrs. Geary used to say, I'm that overgone by it all. And I hardly know whether I'm sitting



on my head or my heels. Nobody ever expressed stupefaction so eloquently as Mrs. Geary. I sent you a picture postcard of the church, so I needn't describe that to you. The most delicious thing about it is that when you sit for awhile alone inside you hear the sea in the same way that you do from inside a deep cave. Sometimes I half expect to turn round with the Host at Mass and perceive a congregation of adoring mermaids. It was built by two princesses of Brittany who were wrecked here long ago. I always think of them dressed in sea-green velvet like the princess in Pisanello's fresco of St. George. The Vicarage is a great gaunt house—or it would be a gaunt house if it weren't covered with all kinds of things like magnolias that my grandfather planted. By the way, I'm sending you a box of queer leaves of various kinds in the hope that your father will be kind enough and clever enough to tell me their names. I have a neighbour, Major Drumgold, who can only be kept under by my being able to browbeat him with the Latin names of plants. I live in the Vicarage like one jackdaw in a huge dovecot. I forget just how many empty rooms there are, and besides empty rooms in the house there is an empty stable and an empty barn and an empty greenhouse and an empty pigstye outside. I am looked after by a ridiculous woman called Jennifer Prawle, whose name is the best part of her, though she has an amusing and fierce old Aunt Penelope, who routs about in the kitchen, grunting and snorting like a pig. They go home every night after washing up, which is rather a grievance on account of the ghosts that stand thick between the Vicarage and their tumbledown cottage along the valley.

The nicest people in Nancepean are William John Evans and his wife. William John is the landlord of the Hanover Inn. I don't know Mrs. Evans' Christian name, because her husband never dares make use of it. They have a delightful boy of eleven called Donald, who has had what I fancy was a tuberculous knee. He's a delicate, fanciful creature, with eyes like a summer night. Mrs. Evans is angular and jealous and passionate, but mercifully accustomed to speak out her mind at once, which most of the people are not. I think that

my chief claim to her favour is the interest that serving at the altar has provided for Donald. It absorbs a good deal of his energy, which, owing to his lameness, has had to be suppressed latterly. Serving is not as likely to involve him in a bad fall as the curiously violent game of Touch that is fashionable among the children of this village. I really do think that I have got hold of him, which is a horrid crustacean way of talking, but you won't misunderstand me. The boy is bursting with the poetry of youth, and the kind of religion he'll get from me will, I hope, encourage him to express himself. One is afraid of fancying mute inglorious Miltons, but I really do believe that this child has a power of vision. I think I am justified in calling Mrs. Evans my leading supporter, especially as her husband, whom she rules with her tongue, is one of the churchwardens. Her only rival could be Miss Lambourne, who has recently come back home to keep house for her farmer brother. She was a nurse in London and acquired an outward gentility of which the rest of the village is profoundly suspicious. At first I was inclined to think that she really was what is called "superior to her surroundings," but latterly I've come to the conclusion that underneath she is just as jealous and primitive and fierce as Mrs. Evans. I went to tea with her last week, and she never passed me a cake without getting in a dig at somebody. I hate that, don't you? I'd sooner be poked in the ribs with the butter-knife. But my real cross is Miss Horton, a lady painter, who comes every morning to Mass with a most idiotic collie called Rover. I don't discourage the dog, because he is sure to throw her off her bicycle presently, and then she'll have to go to the cottage hospital and be fed on vegetable marrows left over from harvest festivals. I know I ought not to say so already, but I've a feeling that I'm going to make a mess of things here. I am writing this because by putting it down on paper I am helping myself to fight the spirit of doubt and despair. So long as I just let it haunt the dim backgrounds of the mind, I'm able to shirk the issue. But now I've written it out, I've no longer any excuse to do that.

I wanted to give you some idea of my parish, and I've only succeeded in writing a muddled letter which tells you nothing.

Yours always,  
M. L.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

MARK had been right in supposing that, if the children of Nancepean intended to try his Sunday school, their wishes would outweigh any distaste of their parents for the kind of religious teaching he would be giving them and the services at which he would be demanding their attendance. The pivot of the collection was Donald Evans, not merely because he was naturally the first child whom Mark would seek to enrol, but also on account of his own qualities of mind and disposition that, in spite of the handicap of lameness and delicate health, had given him the leadership of the Nancepean village school, a world of which Mark would soon have the freedom thanks to his association with the scholars, a world in the contemplation of which he would take refuge as one takes refuge in the world disclosed by the microscope or as children escape from the insolence of reality into fairyland. Lily and Dick, the two Prawle children, were the next; but partly because their attendance was really a portion of the family service, like dusting a room, and partly because neither of them was an interesting child, Mark did not feel that their membership contributed much to the growth of his class. Nor did the addition of Winnie Pellow. Indeed, for the first month it was hard to believe that it was really a Sunday school, so much was it a colloquy between himself and Donald to the accompaniment of the heavy breathing of the other three children, stolid and uncomprehending as the bench on which they sat, their dangling legs expressive of utter indifference to what was going on.

The class was held in the parish-hall, which was a miniature of the hideous chapel next door, and the dreariness of the winter afternoons was accentuated by the sound of sing-



ing in the rival class, where twenty-five children were being instructed by the Reverend Casimir Dale in the mysteries of the Christian faith. Mark fancied that Donald must be smarting under a sense of hopeless inferiority, and that he was perhaps already afraid that his membership of such a negligible Sunday school might imperil his leadership of the secular school. Yet the boy did not show the slightest sign of being in a minority, except on one occasion when the dismissal of the two classes happened to coincide. Then he made some excuse to detain Mark with questions until the twenty-five children next door were safely on their way home.

"I wouldn't like for 'em to laugh at us," he explained to Mark, his brows knitted. "And if I was to punch one of 'em, Mr. Dale might say that was Church manners."

Soon after this Tom Pascoe, the sexton, volunteered to come and play the harmonium so that the children could sing hymns. But Mark could not bear the prospect of Tom Pascoe's snaky face looking at him over the top of the harmonium. It would make him feel self-conscious, and any chance he had of managing to interest Winnie, Dick and Lily would vanish. So he declined Tom Pascoe's offer and tried to persuade himself that hymns were a mistake in a Sunday school class. Soon after this, of all unwelcome people, Miss Horton proposed her services, and Mark, whose conscience had pricked him for refusing Tom Pascoe, accepted them so ungraciously that his conscience pricked him again, and he went to tea with Miss Horton in order to atone for his rudeness. Like an ass he told her in the morning of his intention, so that the whole village resounded with the coming event. Miss Horton went hurrying off full pelt to Rosemarket to buy a chocolate cake, the string round which came undone half-way home, whereupon she bicycled back faster than ever and bought another, with which she arrived in a crimson stew of haste and agitation about a quarter of an hour before her guest was expected. On his way from the Vicarage Mark overtook Miss Lambourne, who gave him good day and hoped with a forgiving smile that he would have a pleasant afternoon at Miss Horton's. This

nearly sent him home again, and it was only by an effort that he controlled his annoyance and continued on his way. On emerging from the cart-track by Roscorla farm, the first thing he saw was the back of Mrs. Tangye, apparently on the watch, for she was clasping her broom as a sentinel his spear and was shielding her eyes against the glitter of the low wintry sun across the sea while she gazed intently down the road that led on to Church Cove.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Tangye," said Mark. "Are you looking for one of your children?"

Mrs. Tangye turned round with a jump, her eyes appearing likely to come through her glasses in goggling amazement.

"Oh, Mr. Lidderdale's come. I am so glad," she exclaimed. "Miss Horton has been out a dozen times to look for 'ee, and I promised her I'd wait about until I see you come along so as she could put the kettle on."

"Good gracious me, Mrs. Tangye," Mark burst out in irritation, "I should have thought you had enough to occupy your time without acting as a scout for Miss Horton."

"Well, that's right, Mr. Lidderdale, I have got enough to do," she agreed warmly. "But there, I didn't like to refuse the poor soul. I do always say if anybody can't be neighbourly to a place like Nancepean one might so well die and be done with it all."

"Nonsense," said Mark testily. "I hope next time that Miss Horton makes such an idiotic request you'll tell her you have something better to do than stand staring about in the middle of the road."

"Will I just run up to Tintagel and tell her Mr. Lidderdale's come?" Mrs. Tangye asked, quite unabashed by Mark's rebuke.

"Certainly not," he snapped, and being aware by now that most of the windows held curious faces behind their lace curtains, he left Mrs. Tangye, and, passing through the elaborately gilded iron gate of Tintagel, strode fuming backwards and forwards along the zigzag path that led up through the narrow garden to the front door. His encounters with preliminary inquisitiveness were not even yet

over, for when the curve of the path brought him close to the clipped escallonia hedge that divided the garden of Tintagel from the garden of Gilead, the villa belonging to Cass Dale, the owner of it bobbed up and greeted him with boisterous cordiality.

"Hallo, Lidderdale, I'm glad you haven't disappointed our neighbour. She's been into Rosemarket and bought you a magnificent cake. I hope you'll drop in again and have tea with us soon. I won't promise you a chocolate cake. Ha, ha, ha! But you won't go empty. The missus will see to that. She said to me only this morning that you looked as if you wanted feeding up. But you mustn't let Miss Horton do it all. You single men have to be careful, you know. Grand day for the time of year, isn't it? I'm just putting in a few seeds."

"What, for parrots?" said Mark.

Cass Dale twirled his yellow moustache and smiled broadly.

"Come, come, you mustn't take umbrage, Lidderdale, at a little bit of harmless chaff."

Inasmuch as she had to appear some time that afternoon, it was perhaps just as well, Mark thought, that Miss Horton chose that moment to do so.

"Oh, how dy'e do, Vicar? I'm so glad you've come. So delighted. Good afternoon, Mr. Dale. What a lovely day! Real Cornish Riviera weather. Mind the mat, Vicar. One is apt to trip over it."

Mark wondered if this statement was based on statistics provided by Mr. Scobell.

"You must excuse the room," his hostess murmured, flitting about among the bric-à-brac and bamboo tables, like a large tropical bird. "We mustn't speak too loud. The walls are so thin in these modern villas. I dare say you wonder how an artist can put up with it. But you know I am always hoping to find a suitable cottage. I only intended to spend a few weeks here, but now I really feel that I shall never have the heart to leave dear little Nancepean. Your coming here as vicar has made such a difference. It's such a boon to get really definite religious teaching again. I assure you

I was fast lapsing into paganism. I was indeed. Mind, Vicar, mind," she screamed, "mind where you're sitting."

Mark nearly ricked his back in an effort not to sit down in the chair he had chosen.

"My palette," she explained. "Oh yes, I know it's disgracefully untidy of me to leave it lying about, but you know really I'm so cramped here. I suppose you never thought seriously of letting your old barn at the Vicarage as a studio?"

"I've never even thought about such a thing in joke," Mark said decidedly.

"Of course, you realize that it would make an ideal studio?" Miss Horton asked, temptation glittering like a jewel in her eyes.

"I don't agree with you at all. I don't agree with you at all, Miss Horton," Mark said hurriedly.

Miss Horton shook a roguish finger at him in reproof, but mercifully at this moment Rover came in and changed the subject by wagging a large cowrie shell and a model in serpentine of Rose Head off one of the bamboo tables on the floor.

"Rover! Rover! Lie down at once, you bad dog. Yes, I know you're glad to see the Vicar, but you mustn't wag your tail so energetically. Lie down, sir, when I tell you."

Miss Horton pressed her two hands firmly upon the collie's back, and after a short resistance he collapsed upon the floor, his nose dangerously close to the lowest tier of the cake-table.

"Are you fond of dogs?" she asked.

"Yes, I'm very fond of them indeed," Mark replied. "In fact, I'm thinking of getting one for the Vicarage." He had at that moment conceived a plan for driving Miss Horton out of Nancepean by importing a ferocious Newfoundland that would attack Rover whenever he met him, and not only prevent Miss Horton's ever coming near the Vicarage, but make her whole life in the open air one long anxiety.

"I have a brother who breeds spaniels," she announced brightly. "I wonder if he'd give me one. I wonder. He might, you know. But it would have to be a great secret if



I gave it to you, because, do you know, my brother is really quite mercenary about his dogs. He sells the puppies!"

"I don't care for spaniels," Mark said as discouragingly as he knew how to.

"Oh, not spaniels?" Miss Horton exclaimed. "But they're so faithful."

"I'd just as soon keep a tame conger-eel," Mark declared.

"Oh, Mr. Lidderdale! Oh, Vicar, how can you say such a thing? Why, I think there's nothing lovelier than a well-bred spaniel. Oh, do look at Rover's expression of disgust."

"He's smelling the cake," Mark said.

"How naughty you are! He's not doing anything of the kind. He's jealous. Do you know, that dog understands every word I say. Rover, do you want to go for a nice walk with your mother?"

At this the collie leaped to his feet and walked round and round the room barking on one intolerable note.

"No, you're not going just yet. Lie down! Good boy, lie down. Rover! Lie down, will you?"

But Rover would not lie down until his mother had once again leaned heavily upon him and borne him to the floor.

Perhaps a Great Dane would be more efficacious than a Newfoundland, Mark was thinking. But could he afford to keep such a large dog? Scarcely, and with the Prawles there were never any scraps. His sinister meditation was interrupted by Miss Horton.

"You realize, of course," she said, looking at him sideways, "that you're very paintable?"

"I hadn't realized it."

"Oh, very," she declared. "Of course, skies are my job, as you know; but really when a person as paintable as you comes along I can hardly be expected to resist, can I?"

"I really don't know what you can do, Miss Horton. But you're certainly not going to paint me."

"How like a man!" she exclaimed. "Oh, isn't that like a man?"

Mark was not clear why his last remark should be considered so typically masculine, but as he much preferred to be considered one of an immense class than to be discussed

as a particular specimen, he did not challenge the comparison.

"Hasn't anybody ever told you that you were frightfully paintable?" Miss Horton persisted.

"Oh, lots of people," he replied. He had no hesitation in telling this lie. It seemed the only way to impress Miss Horton with the hopelessness of her ambition.

"And you never sat for anybody?"

"Never," he declared. "And I never will."

She sighed.

"Skies are so difficult."

"I'm sure they are," Mark agreed. "But at any rate they can't refuse to sit. If I were a painter I should always choose subjects like skies and trees and mountains."

"You've never tried to paint yourself?" she asked, hope visibly rising again.

Mark shook his head.

"I suppose you realize that lots of people have the gift without knowing it? You've got very artistic hands. Do you know I shouldn't be at all surprised if you could paint very well. I wonder if you'd like me to give you a few lessons."

"I did have lessons once," Mark said, who had by now not the least scruple in saying anything. "But the master, the *master* with whom I started told me that I should never make a painter."

"I think masters are apt to be too hasty in their judgments," she went on undaunted. "I wish you'd try again. I could easily lend you my palette and a few brushes and . . ."

"No, really it's most kind of you, Miss Horton, but even if I had the talent I shouldn't have the time."

"I want to consult you about my garden," she said abruptly. "Mr. Scobell has kindly let me assume all responsibility for the garden in front, and I want to have a real blaze of colour next summer. Great splashes! And I want your advice."

Mark wondered if Eve approached Adam like this in Eden.

"But I know nothing about gardening."

"Oh now, come, Vicar, that is really rather a little fib. How can you say that, with your lovely garden at the Vicarage?"

"But I didn't plant that," he said indignantly.

"No, but your grandfather did, and I'm sure you must have inherited his tastes."

"You seem to think that I'm a kind of admirable Crichton," Mark exclaimed, and could have kicked himself for falling into the trap of talking about himself.

"Well, do you know, I do think you're very gifted," Miss Horton replied at once; and as a preliminary to settling down for a really cosy and intimate chat, she lighted a cigarette. "You don't object to women smoking?" she inquired.

"I've never thought anything about it," Mark said, obstinately determined not to admit that he had considered women even generically.

"And do get your pipe going," she begged. "I do so like to see a man smoke his pipe. I can't bear a man who doesn't smoke."

Mark was tempted for a brief instant to declare that he had given up smoking; but he did not feel any confidence in being able to discourage Miss Horton by such a statement, and it would mean going without that delicious pipe after tea, which would be rather too much of a good thing.

"Your pouch looks dreadfully tumbledown," Miss Horton observed. "You badly want a new one."

"Oh, I have a whole drawerful of pouches at home," Mark affirmed. "But I prefer an old pouch."

"I'm so glad to think that I can be of a little use to you on Sundays," Miss Horton sighed. "What hymns would you like me to practise for next Sunday?"

"I'm afraid I haven't thought about them yet," Mark replied.

"I was going to suggest that the kiddies should come in to see me on Saturday afternoon and go over their hymns for the next day. Do you think that would be a help?"

"Well, really, you must decide that yourself, Miss Horton. Only I'd rather, if you don't mind, that the Sunday school

wasn't made a bore for the children. I'd much rather they sang out of tune than have to practise singing as a task."

"Oh, you can rely on me not to make it that, Vicar," she assured him. "Children are very fond of me. And that reminds me. What do you think I have got for you?"

"I can't guess," he said, feeling a little alarmed and recalling jokes in comic papers about embroidered slippers for clergymen.

"Two new pupils. Oh, look, Vicar, look! Do look at my ring! My smoke ring, I mean," she explained with what Mark decided was definitely a coy giggle. "Yes, two new pupils," she went on. "Eddie and Frankie Scobell. Yes, as soon as their mother heard that we were going to have singing practice she told me that they might come. She's anxious for them to learn the piano, and I've promised to teach them."

Mark was not so much pleased with Miss Horton's capture as he would have been if the two Scobell boys had been likely to contribute much in the way of personality to his Sunday school. But he did not feel that they would add anything except a volume of inattentive breath.

"Your capture sounds very much like bribery," he said severely.

"Oh, but I'm so glad to do anything to help you in my small way. I do so believe in what you're trying to give the people here, and I only hope that you won't be disheartened by the way they respond. I don't like to talk about myself, but I have so dreadfully wanted to have an opportunity to tell you how much you have done for me personally. I was fast getting to look back on religion as something that belonged to my extreme youth. I was . . ."

Mark rose.

"We shall have to talk about this another time, Miss Horton. It's getting dusk, and I want to be home before it's quite dark. With all the rain we've been having lately some parts of the road between here and the Vicarage are under water. Thank you very much for your delicious tea, Miss Horton."



"Must you really go?" she sighed. "I'd offer to accompany you some of the way if I . . ."

"Oh no, please, Miss Horton, the road is really not fit for a woman."

"Rover would have enjoyed a little run."

"Yes, but he wouldn't be able to run a yard between here and the Vicarage. Jago's cows are feeding all the way along the road, and they're particularly down on dogs."

"Well, if you must go, you must. I'll walk down with you as far as the gate. I wish you'd been able to give me some advice about the garden. That blaze of colour . . ."

"Nasturtiums. Nothing better than nasturtiums," Mark said quickly. "Good night, Miss Horton."

"There'll be Mass to-morrow at eight, I suppose?" she asked, clutching at the last thread that linked him to her.

"Yes, yes, of course. There's always Mass at eight," said Mark sharply. And slamming the gilded iron gate of Tintagel behind him he hurried away up through the village, the white cottages of which shimmered in the dusk.

It was a wisht road at twilight from Nancepean to the Vicarage. He who must travel it passed through a gate and entered a sudden darkness made by the tall elms that overshadowed Roscorla farm, from which he emerged to follow a deeply-rutted track along the bottom of a narrow valley. On the right the top of the steep slope might stand out clear against the green west, but on his left the night seemed to be pouring down faster and faster into this valley until soon it would brim over with darkness. The eeriest part of the road was about half-way along to the Vicarage, where the wide valley that led up from Church Cove into the heart of the Rhos was reached and a gurgling stream ran across the track, which had to be crossed by seven white stepping-posts. The noise of the water gave the wayfarer an impression that the transit was across a torrent that was capable of sweeping him away and rolling him over and over into the sea a mile or more away, although actually, even in mid-winter, the depth of the water was never much more than two feet. On the other side of the stream on a knoll of rank herbage stood the ruins of what might once have been a small farm-

house. Perhaps the spot was haunted by the strivings and losses and disappointments of bygone owners, or perhaps it was nothing more than its outward aspect of desolation, but even at noon of a fine day Mark would always quicken his footsteps here, and always in doing so would come unawares (although he knew it was there) upon a huge dome of granite bursting from the pasture by the roadside. He wondered in calm moments how a geologist would explain the roundness and symmetry of this isolated outcrop, and in such a mood he would pat it as he might have patted a great benevolent beast, admiring the green and grey lichen that turned its surface into the likeness of a lizard's scaly hide. At other times, as on this dusky walk back from tea with Miss Horton, he was filled with horror of this excrescent bulb of stone, and passing it hurriedly he would look back over his shoulder, because it was seeming impossible to believe that anything so unusual could be content to stay where it was.

The stone was known locally as the Devil's A——, and it was still the custom, on the way to gather limpets at the low tide of Good Friday, to salute it with a kick in passing. It was doubtful if anybody in Nancepean would have had the valour to do the same if he had to pass it on such an evening as this. The Devil? It was difficult to avoid being led away by Manichæus when one began to speculate upon the Devil. That was a specious heresy. The certainty with which the early church grappled with those tremendously logical aberrations of the great heresiarchs was truly miraculous. Unless one believed in the infallible guidance of Almighty God, how was such inevitably acute perception of error explicable? The *Filioque* clause. Shallow critics laughed at the idea of splitting Christendom in two for the sake of barely two words. Learned ones scoffed because, long before the birth of Christ, Shu proceeded from Neb-er-Tcher and with Tefnut made a Trinity. Yet if the procession of the Holy Ghost had been denied to God the Son, where would be His Divinity by now? So long as the *Filioque* clause was retained in the Nicene Creed, one was able to feel that an avowed Arian at any rate could not be a bishop in the

English Church. Was the present deadness of the Orthodox Church directly traceable to its failure to grasp the vital importance of insisting in the double procession? It might be. Not that modernism had made any headway in the Orthodox Church. On the contrary. But to deny that the Comforter proceeded equally from the Son and from the Father was not to know the Comforter. Ο ΠΑΡΗΓΟΡΙΚΟΣ The Paregoric. What tricks language could play! Absurd to think that the same Greek word could be used for a cough-medicine and for the Holy Ghost. The Devil? Ο ΔΙΑΒΟΛΟΣ The Slanderer. Of what? Of God's purpose? It was merely ludicrous to perceive in that outcrop the likeness of the Devil's rump mocking Heaven. And yet somehow all round the spot one was aware of Evil. It threw a chill upon the heart. It was the Panic. Perhaps that stone had been used in the abominable assemblies of witchcraft. The meeting-place of a Covin? The Devil's hinder-quarters were always cold. They all testified to that. This was a likely part of the world for the debased forms of some ancient religion to linger. There was surely elemental evil hereabouts. But could evil be elemental? Was not that to admit it, coeternity with God? Manichæus again. "Who's that shuffling toward me farther down the road?" Footsteps only half-human. Padded footsteps. Mark stopped and waited for a moment in the deep twilight, from which presently Toby Prawle materialized.

"Good evening, Toby, you gave me quite a start."

"Wish you good evening, Mr. Lidderdale," the little furtive man replied in a singsong voice like the rise and fall of a light wind across the path.

"Did you have any luck on the beach to-day?" Mark inquired.

"I found Coastguard's pipe he left on the cliff he didn't rightly know where to. I belong taking it to him now. 'Tis a handsome pipe wi' silver band and all. Coastguard will be pleased to see his pipe again, I believe."

"Well, good night, Toby."

"Wish you good night, Mr. Lidderdale."

The little furtive man shuffled on toward the village,

chuckling to himself in anticipation of the golden chinks in the blinds, to which he would put his red-rimmed eyes, and of the beers that Wilton the coastguard would stand him at the Hanover Inn to celebrate the rescue of his pipe.

Mark was glad to be back in his room and found relief, even pleasure, in listening to Jennifer and Aunt Penelope preparing dinner, however much it might sound rather like the tuning-up of an infernal orchestra. Nor, when dinner was finally ready about an hour after it should have been, did the quality of it provide a nepenthe for so much preliminary tintinnabulation of glass and crockery. This evening, too, Lily, who was being encouraged to suppose at the age of nine that she might be a parlourmaid at sixteen, dropped the tray on the threshold of the dining-room and added the lamentations of horns to the bassoons of Aunt Penelope's reproaches and the squealing piccolos of her mother's nervous fury. In spite of all this, Mark was sorry when it was time for the family to leave him alone in the house. He stood and watched from one of the great empty rooms their lantern conjuring the huge shapes of trees from the darkness of the drive until at last it went bobbing out of sight down the valley—an *ignis fatuus* in the moonless night.

"An *ignis fatuus*?" said Mark to himself, as he turned to leave the empty room and go downstairs to sit by the more profitable fire in his study. "That describes my own position as Vicar of Nancepean."

He reached out for the volume of Jacob Boehme in the toils of whose mystical net he was struggling; but he let it lie unopened on his knee and leaned back in his chair, pondering vacantly the great parasol of reflected lamplight on the ceiling.

"Why should solitude have the power to reduce a man to a state of besotted inertia? Is the human will really dependent on the working of other wills all round it?"

Mark pulled himself from his chair with an effort and went up to bed. His last thought just before going to sleep was that Miss Horton would be at Mass, and it was his first thought when he woke in the morning. His state of



mind was a travesty of the state of mind of a lover—a kind of falling in hate. However, after the added gloom that Miss Horton gave to a raw grey morning, the rest of the day was fine; for not only did the actual clouds disperse before noon, but on his way to make some calls in the village after lunch Donald Evans shouted to him from the playground and asked if he could speak to him a minute after school.

"I shall be somewhere in the village," Mark shouted back. "Come along and find me when you're let out."

They met outside Mrs. Pellow's and walked back toward the inn like a pair of conspirators.

"Do 'ee remember," Donald asked, "when I told 'ee that Arthur Tangye wouldn't mind if his mother beat him so long as he could come church and do the same as what I belong to do every Sunday?"

Mark nodded.

"I remember it well."

"I didn't say no more to him," Donald went on. "Because it wasn't no use to make him think that he was so grand we couldn't get along without him."

"Quite right," Mark approved. "We church folk have got to make it quite clear that it's what the others miss by not coming to church, not what we gain by their coming."

"Well, Arthur Tangye whispered to me this morning in school if he could speak to me when we come out. He said, 'Can I speak to 'ee when we come out, boy Donald?' and I whispered back, 'Yes, if you've a mind to, boy Arthur,' and Miss Vivian banged both of us on the head with her ruler for talking in lessons. But when we come out and I said to boy Arthur I'd a good mind to put tin-tacks in the road so as she'd puncture her bicycle, because she were getting too fond of clouting anybody over the head with her darned old ruler, boy Arthur said he didn't mind nothing how Miss Vivian clouted him, because his mother had said he could come to church sunday school if you'd a mind to have him."

"Bravo!" Mark exclaimed.

"Yes, but wait a bit, Mr. Lidderdale, because that isn't

all. Mrs. Tangye said she were glad to send him and maid Sophie and maid Susie and maid Elsie so well, because she weren't going to be told by Ernie Hockin that the chapel was swept out a disgrace last week. If it wasn't for the shilling a week, she said, she'd never put her foot to chapel again or leave any of her children go neither. She said just because anybody was poor, that didn't say anybody to Nancepean who'd a mind could trample on her. She wasn't going to say nothing about Walter and Jimmie, because they was old enough to choose for theirselves, and if they was wedding for Mr. Stithian to Pentine they'd better stay as they was. But none of the rest of them should go chapel, and if Ernie Hockin said her sweeping was a disgrace she'd go straight to the Reverend Cass and ask him to rub his hands where he'd a mind to, and if he could find a speck of dust on his fingers she'd pay back the shilling that week out of her own money."

Donald stopped breathless and triumphant.

"Well, I think that's splendid news you've brought me," Mark said. "Oh, by the way, Donald, Miss Horton has very kindly offered to give you all a singing lesson every Saturday evening at half-past five, so that you can practise the hymns."

Donald made a grimace.

"Miss Horton can't sing no better than an old shag."

"Donald, don't talk like that about Miss Horton, or for that matter anybody else."

"Well, 'tis no good for Miss Horton to try and boss us about."

"She won't try and boss you about."

"I know she will then. She belongs to be a regular old nuisance."

"Well, I don't want to discuss Miss Horton now. I don't mind if you go to practise or not, but if you want to have hymns you'll have to get Miss Horton to help you. I can't play the harmonium."

"Dolly Masterman might have come and played. How didn't 'ee ask her?"

"I didn't ask Miss Horton," said Mark hurriedly. "She volunteered. Dolly Masterman didn't volunteer."

"I daresay she didn't know there was volunteering going around," Donald said.

"Well, please drop the subject of Miss Horton, and don't spoil your other good news by foolish grumbling. If your singing gets on, we can start a choir in church. Boys and girls both."

"Put the maids in surplices?" Donald queried in very doubtful accents.

"Of course not," Mark answered. "Who ever heard of such a thing?"

"I'm glad," Donald said with a sigh of relief. "They're saucy enough now, but if they was put in surplices they'd be so proud as paycocks, and nobody could say a word to them more. Look see, there's boy Arthur waiting by Polgarth gate," Donald exclaimed. "He's waiting to know if you'll lev him come Sunday school."

The hero of the Tangye schism was a round little boy of ten, very like his father with a snub nose and freckled cheeks, but without his father's red hair, his own colour taking after Mrs. Tangye's washed-out yellow. He slid down from the gate of Polgarth farm and advanced slowly and shyly to greet Mark. His cheeks were crimson with embarrassment; his big steadfast eyes were downcast; but his smile was so definite that it seemed really distinct from the rest of him and to possess an existence of its own like the Cheshire Cat's, and to be able to project itself before him with an assurance that its nominal owner, kicking one foot against the other and muttering inaudible replies to Mark's questions, entirely lacked, so that Mark talked more to the smile than to Arthur himself. However, when he heard that he would be welcome at the school and that on the very next Sunday he should put on cassock and surplice to march in procession beside Donald in front of his Vicar, Arthur's confusion left him. He offered a small grubby hand to be taken by Mark and stepped out proudly beside him, while Donald in an access of jubilation hopped on his whole leg half the way from Polgarth gate to the Hanover Inn. Here Arthur said

good-bye, and went bouncing back to the village like a cricket-ball thrown in from the deep field.

"Boy Arthur's happy he's coming to church," said Donald.

"And we're very happy to have him, eh?" said Mark.

"I expect it'll mean a fight between him and Charlie Woods to-morrow going to school," Donald prophesied. "But Arthur won't mind. He do dearly love fighting with Charlie Woods. Yesterday they fought because Charlie Woods pegged Arthur Tangye's top with his new top and Arthur picked 'un up and throwed 'un into old Miss Lassiter's pig bucket; and the day before they fought because Charlie was drinking at the pump and Arthur come along and pumped hard so as the water spouted all over Charlie Woods and nearly drowned him. So Charlie Woods called Arthur a bad word and spitted at him. And then they was to it. But Charlie Woods he do hate church and Arthur do know that, and Arthur told me the first word Charlie said he'd belong to ponch him on the nose."

This youthful protagonist of the chapel who was likely to take offence at Arthur's apostasy was the son of old Samuel Dale's carter.

Mark went back to the Vicarage much more cheerfully that evening after a jolly tea at the inn. To be sure, Mrs. Evans was pessimistic about the endurance of the young Tangyes.

"They'll come just so long as their mother stays mad with Ernest Hockin, and after that she'll take 'em away again so fast as she sent them."

"Now, don't be discouraging, Mrs. Evans," Mark laughed. "Let me have them for a month, and I'll guarantee to keep them for a year, and if I can keep them for a year I'll hope to keep them for ever."

"I'll be surprised if you have them come more than once," Mrs. Evans declared sombrely. Then she added tartly: "And how's Penelope Prawle and Jennifer looking after 'ee?"

"Oh, not too badly," Mark said. "Rather noisily, of course, but they do their best."

Mrs. Evans tossed her head.



"I warned you they was the laziest good-for-nothingest family for miles around, and I spoke truly, I believe."

"They're not very competent," Mark admitted. "But they might be worse."

Then Mrs. Evans went off in one of her sibylline moods, uttering dark ambiguities that might have prophesied anything from murder to the theft of his solitary napkin-ring.

However, Mark was not going to be cast down by Mrs. Evans, and he spent a cheerful evening planning all sorts of devices to make his Sunday school the most interesting and original in the whole of England. With a Sunday school of ten scholars he was justified in introducing to Nancepean the stamp system he had wanted to introduce at Galton. But something else was required besides collecting attendances at Mass and Sunday school if one did not want to be accused of paying more attention to religious forms than to the practical application of them to daily existence. Mark gave much thought to the invention of a system of recording behaviour that should be proof against the encouragement of self-righteousness and that would not foster a deliberate endeavour to be good for the credit they gained rather than for the love of goodness. He decided to order for each of his scholars a small wooden money-box, the key of which he should keep himself. He should explain to the class that these boxes represented their daily lives and that every week during the last hymn of Sunday school he should put into these boxes various coloured counters, each of which would represent some action of theirs, good or bad, either that he had noticed himself or that in some way or another had been brought to his notice. A white counter would represent a good action, a black counter a bad one. A red counter would stand for an act of cruelty or unkindness bad enough to be recorded whether it was to an animal or to a grown-up person or to one of themselves. A yellow counter would indicate jealousy, and a green counter would be a compliment to the owner's appreciation of the gift of life, whether by doing his work well or by playing hard or by enjoying the beauties of earth and sea and sky or simply by being happy. A purple counter would be a serious blot on the blues and

greens, because it would mean that the possessor of it had displayed vanity and self-satisfaction. For good behaviour in church there would be blue counters, and any kind of dreariness, which would include bad behaviour in church, would be penalized with a brown counter. Of course, no child would know what counters had been dropped into his box until the Day of Judgment when the boxes would be opened and every child rewarded according to its deserts. Rewarded? That was really a bad system. The moment a prize was given the whole value of the preliminary competition was destroyed. In fact the quickness with which the word competition came first to his lips as a description of the business was itself an argument against rewards. There ought not to be any kind of competition. Yet how otherwise was the interest of the children to be maintained? Well, the reward would have to suggest itself when the boxes were opened on the Day of Judgment. He could manage the expense of the money-boxes and counters out of his own money, but he should have to beg the necessary equipment for the stamps. Whom should he ask? Mark decided upon a rich maiden lady to whose spiritual needs he had ministered at St. Cyprian's. He wrote off to her that night, and having done so felt that he ought to invite Miss Horton to contribute something. She probably had such excellent intentions, and it would not be encouraging her unduly to ask her to make him a rainbow-coloured bag to contain the tokens. Ah, that was the very word for the counters. Tokens. And the rainbow bag should be a covenant of peace between Miss Horton and himself.

Exciting plans will populate even so large and so empty a house as the Vicarage of Nancepean, and to-night Mark found it small and crowded and cosy. Why should not the two little Wilton girls make the ten scholars a dozen? His last plan before going to sleep was to visit the coastguard the following afternoon and press for his children's attendance at the Sunday school.

The coastguards' cottages stood on the first rise of the low green cliffs that ran along the two miles of steep deserted beach between Nancepean and Rose Pool. A shingly track

ran down past the gate of Polgarth farm to what was called Nancepean Cove, though it was really nothing more than the end of the long beach beyond which the cliffs began to rise gradually to the savage heights of Pendhu. A windlass and the three pilchard boats of the Nancepean Fishing Company gave the spot a faint flavour of maritime industry which was enhanced by the flag-post on the grass platform in front of the neat white cottages, only one of which was inhabited nowadays.

Wilton himself was a spare, swarthy man, whose ship-shape cottage might have been taken up and deposited in a battleship without enraging the commander by its inappropriateness. His wife, a soft-cheeked little woman with a gentle voice, must be a domestic treasure, Mark decided, while Rosie and Maggie, the two little daughters of eight and seven, might have been two illustrations cut out of a book of nursery-rhymes, so pink their cheeks, so white their pinafores, so demurely did they sit side by side on the leather-covered sofa which took up the whole of one wall and a quarter of the floor of the little front sitting-room that was so like a cabin. Not a detail was wanting to the ideal picture of a bluejacket's home from the faded photographs of old ships to the windows tightly shut against the balmy air of this fine winter afternoon, from the four shells that whispered of the sea on the mantelpiece to the pots of geraniums and ferns that shut out the view of it from the window-seat.

Mark and his host chatted for awhile about the lucky finding of his pipe by Toby Prawle, of the dullness of a coast-guard's life after seeing so much of the world, and of Wilton's bronchitis which was making it look as if he should presently have to ask for sick leave.

"You see, sir, I'm a Greenwich man myself," he told Mark. "And being a Greenwich man this here place don't suit me. It were the same when I had the coast in Dawsit round Swanage way. This here bronchitis took me something cruel. You know, it took hold of my bronchial chubes. Hoarse? Well, I reckon I was hoarse. I reckon it 'ud have frightened a raving to hear the way I croaked. I'm breaving

very hard again this afternoon. That's the glass what's done that. I often says, joking like, I says, 'You can hear the wind a-getting up in my bronchial chubes,' I says, and that's a fact."

He tapped his chest and took a deep breath.

"Hear it? That means we shall have a blow inside of the next twelve hours. Of course we don't hyst the cone here, but if we did I'd hyst it without waiting for the telephone to come through from Portrose. You follow my meaning? It's a kind of a warning."

"But how did you get on when you were at sea?" Mark asked in some astonishment. "Surely that was worse than Nancepean?"

"Worse? No!" Wilton declared emphatically. "Why, you couldn't have nothing worse than Nancepean not wherever you was. Not for bronchitis you couldn't. And that's a fact. Not as I'm grouching at the berth, and if we do lay too much in the wind's eye, the bottom's good, if you follow my meaning. But it's the out and about night and day that gets me. Why, I wouldn't have lost my pipe if I hadn't coughed it out of my mouth the other night, and it was blowing so hard and so blooming dark I couldn't find it nohow."

Mrs. Wilton was by now sending in the various constituents of the tea by Rosie and Maggie, who, filled with the importance of the occasion, went back and forth from the little kitchen with processional solemnity. At last Rosie, the elder, appeared with the teapot itself. Her eyes were fixed with such intentness upon the balance of the teapot that she bumped into a chair.

"Look where you're steering, my lass," her father called out. "Starboard! Starboard! Or you'll be on the rocks. That's better. Way enough!"

The teapot was deposited upon a thick mat of berlin wool, and the family gathered round the table.

"I was wondering, Wilton," said Mark when everybody was well loaded up with bread and jam, "I was wondering if you wouldn't like your little girls to come to my Sunday school."



It struck him while he was speaking that it was odd how instinctively he should have turned to the father with the proposal instead of the mother. But the truth was that Mrs. Wilton did not seem to count for much apart from her husband.

She was neat and pretty and competent, but one did not approach her directly even on a matter that conventionally might have been supposed to come within her province.

"But they go to the Sunday school already," said the coastguard.

"To the chapel school," Mark reminded him.

"Well, you see, sir, when we first come ashore here, there *was* only one school. And though I was never much of a one for Methodies or Roming Catholics, I didn't like the notion of the kiddies mounching around of a Sunday afternoon, and so I made the best of it."

Then Maggie, blushing hotly and gulping down a large lump of bread and jam, testified:

"Please, I'd like to go to church school, daddy."

Her father stared at her in amazement at such a precocious knowledge of her own mind. It did not seem to displease him, however, for, pushing back his chair, he slapped his leg and said:

"Would you now and all, and how mought that be, my lass?"

"And Rosie would like to go to church school, too," Maggie continued firmly.

The coastguard planted his hands on his knees and leaned across the table to examine this strange new daughter of his. As for Rosie, she swallowed nervously once or twice and sat silent, her eyes wide open with alarm at the possible effect upon their father of her little sister's declaration.

"And so you'd like to go to church school as well?" he demanded, swinging round to confront his elder daughter.

Rosie gave him what is called a sickly smile and expelled from her lips the wraith of an affirmative.

But Maggie was more explicit.

"I'd like to go because Elsie Tangye's going next Sunday,

and Rosie would like to go because Susie Tangye's going next Sunday."

"Polly," said the coastguard, turning to his wife, "they pair on 'em can both go next Sunday."

"Of course, if they come to the church school," Mark put in, "they'll have to come to church too."

"Oh, but it's such a long way," Mrs. Wilton put in. "We did manage to get down for the Harvest Home, but it makes everything so late of a Sunday. The dinner and all I mean. And Wilton don't like it if his dinner's late."

"Surely the children can come along with the others," Mark argued.

"Of course they can," the coastguard declared. "In a convoy."

The faint objection raised by his wife was quite enough to make him take up a strong attitude in the matter.

Maggie clapped her hands gravely.

"I'm glad," she cooed, and filling her mouth with an even larger piece of bread and jam than usual, she sat munching in a stolid ecstasy.

As Mark walked home he kept counting up to himself his scholars and subtracting his captures from the chapel school. It had been twenty-five to four last Sunday. Next Sunday it would be seventeen to twelve. As a matter of fact it was actually sixteen to thirteen, because Willie, the youngest Tangye, aged three, insisted on accompanying the brothers and sisters with whom his short life had made him familiar rather than those comparatively distant and almost unknown kinsmen, Walter and Jimmie, who were both more than ten years older than himself. Willie Tangye did not add much to the scholarship of Mark's school, added nothing, indeed, except a certain amount of cubic space in globular form and a capacity for breathing more heavily than any child Mark had ever heard.

The news of the secessions from chapel had moved Nancepean profoundly; and when Mark was arranging the order of his solemn entry from the sacristy it was hard work to keep the children from chattering about the sensation they had created.

"Mr. Lidderdale," chanted Arthur's high and intensely earnest voice. "Mr. Lidderdale, when we come out of our cottage to walk down, old Miss Lassiter come right out of her door and stood and looked at us."

"And she shook her stick at us and cursed us," Susie gabbled.

"And old Mr. Dale, the Reverend Cass's father, stood in the middle of the road and shouted out: 'What's all this mane?' " Arthur went on.

"All right, Arthur, but don't tell me now," Mark said. "Wait until Mass is over, and do mind you don't fall over your cassock."

"'Tis too long," said Arthur.

It was indeed—about a foot too long—and would have given the appearance of a sack race to the priest's entrance if the cassock of Donald, the other acolyte, had not been at least two feet too short.

"Now, silence!" Mark demanded. "Go in, the choir! Elsie Tangye and Maggie Wilton first. Then Susie Tangye and Rosie Wilton. Then Sophie Tangye by herself, and then Eddie and Frank Scobell. Get along; why don't you start, Elsie and Maggie? Can't you hear the harmonium?"

"'Tisn't maid Elsie and maid Maggie who won't go," said Susie Tangye. "'Tis Sophie don't want to walk in by herself. She's afraid. The foolish thing!"

Susie, round-faced as her brother Arthur and of the same colouring, pointed a finger at her elder sister, who was plump with a complexion like milk and the brightest red hair of the family. Sophie turned away and hid her head in shame.

"But, my dear child, you're the biggest girl in the choir. That's why I told you to walk by yourself," Mark said.

"I don't want to walk by myself," said Sophie, trembling on the verge of tears; for she was soft and melting and feminine and to her younger sister as a Persian cat to a Siamese.

"Go on then," said Susie contemptuously. "Do 'ee walk with maid Rosie and I'll walk by myself."

Here the lips of Rosie Wilton, who had set her heart on

walking in beside Susie, began to tremble. Mark was in despair of ever reaching the chancel. He was on the point of setting down the chalice and paten in order to rearrange the whole procession, when Arthur Tangye tripped over his cassock, and in his effort to save himself from falling propelled his sister Susie through the sacristy door into the full view of the congregation.

"Quick, quick!" cried Mark. "You've started now."

Maggie Wilton, the blood of seamen in her veins, grappled with the emergency, and dragging Elsie Tangye in her wake, followed close on the heels of Susie, whose delicious laughter at her mishap rose like silvery bells above the droning of the harmonium. Sophie and Rosie forgot to weep and stepped out boldly, with the Scobell boys close behind them. It would have been a triumphant Mass if Tom Pascoe had not deliberately played every hymn wrong and if Mark had not found himself wondering why Winnie Fellow had not been allowed to join the choir.

As soon as the service was over Mark tackled the organist about his behaviour.

"If the hymns was wrong," said Tom Pascoe sulkily, "it weren't my fault. Miss Horton took it on herself to have a choir practice and never said nothing to me about the hymns until five minutes before church began. I belong to choose the hymns. If Miss Horton's going to choose 'em, lev the woman play them."

Mark did not wait to consider the policy of getting rid of Tom Pascoe like this, but said at once:

"Very well, Pascoe, you can consider that this is the last service at which you will play."

"You can't get rid of me like that," the organist retorted. "I'm paid five pound a year by the churchwardens to play twice every Sunday, and 'tis for they who pays me to give me notice fitty."

"William John!" Mark called out angrily.

The churchwarden advanced sheepishly.

"I don't require Tom Pascoe's services any more. How much is he owed?"

"We belong to pay him at Easter," said William John.



"Very well, pay him up to Easter. But he won't play at another service."

"Oh, come now, Mr. Lidderdale, that's being a bit too hasty," said William John. "I don't believe Tom meant to put 'ee out for the purpose."

But he said no more, for his coat was violently jerked by his wife.

"Was there ever such a man for talking?" she exclaimed fiercely. "How don't 'ee do what the Vicar says and lev Tom Pascoe and such like look after theirselves. A proper churchwarden you do be!"

Mark turned away and ran to overtake Mrs. Pellow, who was hurrying out of the churchyard gate.

"Aren't you going to let Winnie sing in the choir?" he asked.

She looked at a distant horizon and answered in accents as remote as her gaze.

"Oh no, thank you, Mr. Lidderdale. I don't care to leave Winnie sit so far away from me. Besides, the maid is too shy for singing."

"But, Mrs. Pellow," Mark begged, "just when the choir has been started, surely you aren't going to be the only mother who keeps her little girl away from it. You make it so hard for me."

"I believe there's plenty and more than plenty to the choir," said Mrs. Pellow obstinately. "And I'd rather Winnie stayed with me."

"Aren't you going to let her come to Sunday school alone?" Mark asked.

"Oh, we'll see, we'll see," said Mrs. Pellow more remotely than ever.

However, in spite of Mrs. Pellow's evident annoyance over something Mark must have done to offend her, Winnie did come to Sunday school that afternoon. The stamp-albums and the stamps had not yet arrived, but Mark had his money-boxes ready, the presentation of which created considerable interest, not to say excitement, among the children. Miss Horton was not allowed to come to the Parish Hall until the actual lesson was over. Mark did not feel

that he should be able to talk to the children at all successfully with Miss Horton at such close quarters.

"You'll leave us go out when the chapel school goes out, won't 'ee?" Donald begged.

"Why, I thought you liked to let them get ahead," Mark said with a smile.

"Only when we was so few," Donald explained. "There won't be above two or three more than us this afternoon, and perhaps not that, because Katie Hockin and May Woods both ate something to Rosemarket yesterday afternoon and had the belly-ache all this morning and couldn't go chapel."

"Now then, children, are you ready?" Miss Horton asked, her hands poised like kestrels above the keys. "Very well, then. Now show the Vicar how loudly you can sing."

*We are but little children weak!*

One would never have suspected it, Mark thought, from the lusty bawling that rattled the windows of the Parish Hall.

*A—A—a—a—men!*

"I reckon if anyone passed up along or down along while we was singing," Donald said, "he must have been skeered out of his life to hear such a noise. I never heard so much noise come from the Parish Hall in all my life."

"I did once," Arthur Tangye piped.

"Oh, you never didn't, boy Arthur," his sister Susie protested.

"Yes, I did then," Arthur chanted, his cheeks all flushed with the urgency of establishing a fact. "There was more noise when Sir Henery Vyell come over to talk to the Unionists and the Liberals wouldn't lev him speak. Because Charlie Woods and me thought they was fighting inside, and he climbed up on my back and looked through the window, and they was only hollering, and I left him fall with a bomp, and when he got up he called me a darned old Unionist, and I hit 'un and then he hit me, and then we hit each other for some long time while they was hollering in-

side, and Granfa Hockin come past and asked us if we thought we'd go to Heaven, and when I turned around to answer him Charlie Woods hit me on the ear, and I was so mad I chased 'un round the Hall, and he run bomp into Granfa Hockin so as he nearly fell over."

These circumstantial details greatly impressed his audience, who, Mark included, listened to him spellbound until Miss Horton interrupted:

"Come, come, children, don't gossip. Hymn number three hundred and thirty-seven. *There's a friend for little children.*"

At the end of the fourth verse Donald called out:

"Hark, listen! they're coming out of chapel!"

The church scholars forgot all about the hymn in their anxiety to triumph over their rivals, and Miss Horton was left singing alone in a quavering voice:

*There's a song for little children  
Above the bright blue sky,  
A song that will not weary,  
Though sung continually,  
A song which even Angels  
Can never, never sing.*

"Finish the hymn with this verse," Mark said to Miss Horton.

She struggled breathlessly with the last two lines:

*They know not Christ as Saviour,  
But worship Him as King.*

*Amen.*

"All right," Mark said. "You can go."

He did not think that much would be gained by keeping them back to say the *Grace of Our Lord* at a moment of such impatience, and as they rushed outside to demonstrate their force to the scholars of the chapel Sunday school, he made up his mind to put a green counter in each money-box next Sunday and thereby mark his appreciation of their zest in life.

## CHAPTER VII

### CANDLEMAS

MARK had been intending to pay a call upon Cass Dale and his wife some time during the week, but after what might be considered such a successful display of poaching he was afraid of appearing to triumph over his rival, and the visit was postponed. Nevertheless chance brought about a meeting between himself and the minister, brought it about, too, in a way that gave it a peculiar significance, and in some respects a peculiar poignancy. Mark had taken advantage of a fine day after the gale, which Wilton the coastguard had foretold and which had blown with fury for the better part of three days and nights, to go for a long walk. He chose the two miles of desolate beach that lay between the coastguards' cottages and the Rose Bar, the bank of fine shingle that divided the Atlantic from the Rose Pool. Generally when he chose this direction he took the grassy path along the low cliffs above the beach; but to-day he wanted to be as near as he could to the huge waves which, like combers on a tropic beach, broke here at regular intervals with all the might of the Atlantic in the thunderous afterswell of the gale. Nowhere that Mark knew did the waves of the sea roll in so proudly from the deep as when they broke upon this beach, nowhere did they show so clear and cold a green as when, with arched necks and spumy jaws, they sprang like dragons at the land. Gradually, however, as he plodded across the soft slope of the shingle, the impression of ferocity vanished from his picture of these slow-breaking waves. They seemed rather to be flinging upon earth the treasures of the ocean, fragments from fathomless palaces of pearl and alabaster, of malachite and jade and lapis-lazuli, the shattered mirrors of mermaids and the unloosed silver girdles of the Oceanides. The hours he



had spent upon this beach twenty years ago took possession of the present, and there was not a rocky conformation at the base of the cliff nor even a tress of seaweed that did not offer itself to his imagination with the transcendental reality youth perceives beyond the outward form of the commonest object. At last in this fanciful mood he reached the Rose Bar where the eye of youth was not needed to enhance the scene, nor the mind of youth to thrill to the roar of the leonine waves as they crashed down upon the shingle to the left of him, while to the right the tideless mere lapped at the same shingle as quietly as a kitten, hardly fifty yards of beach separating the two waters at high tide. Mark wandered along the banks of the Pool which, on the far side steep and wooded to the water's edge, ran level here with a flat stretch of low-lying meadows. He looked across at the lonely farmhouse on the green cusp of high land that divided the two creeks of the great heart-shaped mere, and thought how, if plans made long ago on summer afternoons where he was walking now had come into being, he and Cass Dale would be farming that promontory, partners for life. He decided to revisit another haunt of theirs in the old days. A few yards beyond the brake of reeds and cushions of spongy moss in which the waters of the creek faded out there was a forsaken orchard of ancient cherry-trees that overshadowed the ruins of a cottage and a great slimy water-wheel, the stiff joints of which no longer responded to the attentions of a stream tumbling down from the high ground through a narrow and rocky bed overarched with brambles and in summer plumed with ferns.

It was the first of February, early enough in the year to congratulate oneself on finding an unusual number of primroses in bloom on the sheltered banks which had once marked the boundaries of the mill garden. Mark had set himself the pleasant task of gathering a nosegay, when a shadow crossed the pale flowers, and, looking up, he saw Cass Dale himself standing just where he and Cass Dale had gathered flowers and dreamed dreams and made plans and frightened each other with stories of the monster that lived in the Pool and had an unpleasant habit of putting out

an arm and dragging down to the depths any wayfarer belated upon the banks of its abode.

"Why, I was just thinking about you, Cass," he said.

"And I was thinking about you, Lidderdale," the other replied.

"How we used to love this place, eh?" said Mark.

"I wasn't thinking of that," the minister replied sullenly. "I was thinking I'd warn you not to go against me too far, Lidderdale. I haven't said a word as yet, but if you're going to make religion in Nancepean a competition between you and me, I'll have to look after my own side. You can't expect me to sit down under it. I've got a name to keep in these parts, you know."

"I'm afraid I don't quite see what your name has to do with it," Mark replied. "I presume you're alluding to the fact that some of the Nancepean children have changed their Sunday school. Well, they did it of their own accord, for you know as well as I do that the children go their own way in Cornwall."

"Yes, but there's ways and ways of getting them. You won't try and tell me you converted them fair and square by your preaching. It was that Christmas tree of yours that started it. As long as they think they'll have a better time by going to church than by going to chapel, you'll keep them. Only, I don't call that any kind of a way to bring children to Christ Jesus. I call that buying them. And nothing less. But if it's to be treat against treat and entertainment against entertainment—well, there's plenty of time to see who's going to win at that game. Though I'd sooner not have done it in that way."

"You seem to forget, Cass, that I'm just as sure as you are that my faith is the right faith. You can't seriously suppose that I'm going to sit still and watch you take entire charge of the religious life of Nancepean. I'm sorry you've tackled me like this, especially here in this orchard where you and I once thought alike about a lot of things. If Almighty God puts it into the hearts of the children to worship in His Church, you cannot expect me to forbid them."

"Aye, if He puts it into their hearts and not their stomachs," Cass retorted bitterly.

"But, Cass, I don't understand what you want me to do."

"I want you to play fair."

"I am playing fair."

"It isn't playing fair to have all this jiggery-pokery with stamps and to turn a child's life into a game of tiddly-winks with a lot of coloured counters. Stand up and preach the Gospel like a man. Don't turn religion into a newspaper competition."

Mark laughed.

"You really can't expect me not to try to make my Sunday school attractive by any means I can think of. My stamps and counters are a good deal more practical than the mawkish tales you shower on them for prizes. There aren't going to be any prizes in my school. That's where you'll have a chance of catching up."

"Catching up?" Cass repeated, reddening with annoyance. "It'll be some long time before you're so far ahead of me as all that. But why do you pretend you aren't trying to tickle the children's fancy? What's all this about giving them candles to-morrow morning? Do you want to turn your church into a grocer's shop?"

"To-morrow is the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, commonly called Candlemas. The congregation and choir will go in procession round the church with lighted candles in order to symbolize the entry of the Light of the World into the Temple at Jerusalem. You'll remember the verse from the Song of Simeon. *To be a light to lighten the Gentiles and to be the glory of Thy people Israel.*"

"Well, I call such behaviour in the House of the Lord rank tomfoolery," Cass declared.

"My dear Cass, whatever you call it can't make much difference to my congregation. I only tried to explain to you the reason of the candles being given out to-morrow morning, so that you shouldn't think I was plotting to entice the children away from you with playthings and treats."

Mark tried to see his old friend as a boy and to fancy that

they were arguing together now in this dim cherry-orchard about the proper eleven to represent England at cricket instead of the varieties of religious observance. Unfortunately, his companion was by no means willing to be retrojected into the past, but on the contrary seemed inclined to insist to the full upon the position he had won for himself in the present. Even if Cass did allow for a brief moment the personal relation between them to be revived, he always assumed the airs of a senior toward a new boy who must first be taught that he is an intruder and learn to accept that position before he can expect his comments to be listened to. When Mark tried to speak with the voice of the Church, Cass merely resented it as an unjustifiable exhibition of personal conceit and made it perfectly clear that he was the only one who possessed any excuse for displaying that.

"It's a pity," Mark said at last, "that you and I can't build up an edifice of goodwill on the foundations we laid for it as children. But by the way you're talking this afternoon I fear that our friendship is as much a broken-down affair as this wheel on which the water drips as ineffectually as words on our friendship. Which way are you going home?"

"Oh, I've one or two calls to make in this direction, and I must be getting along," Cass muttered.

"Our meeting has not led to much," said Mark sadly.

"It has led to a good deal, if you'll be warned in time. I bear you no ill will, Lidderdale; but from the moment I see that you intend to fight I shall hit first and hit hard."

They parted, and as Mark walked back, taking this time the cliff path above the lonely beach, he wondered which should serve as a symbol of the Church in Nancepean, the cliffs or the sea. It would depend upon one's mood. Sometimes it would be more natural to find a prototype of the Church in these stolid green cliffs which year in and year out stood firm against the assaults of that glittering mass of water. Sometimes one would derive a great sense of security from the ability of such an unpretending line of cliffs to resist as they did. It would confirm one's belief in the power of normality to defeat extravagance. But at other



times these stolid green cliffs would present themselves to the imagination as typical of indifference and complacency; then the emerald of the arched waves would make the dull grass appear contemptible, and the only spiritual effort worth while would be to thunder against them with the voice of authority and to wither them with the salt spume of reality and finally to break them down and overwhelm them with the glittering immensity of the Divine purpose.

When Mark reached the village he decided to look in at Miss Horton's and see how the choir practice was going on. He thought, too, that it would be a good opportunity to rehearse once more with Donald and Arthur the distribution of the blessed candles before Mass. He had not arrived half-way up the zigzag path of Tintagel when Miss Horton appeared in the front door waving violently at him not to come any farther. Mark hesitated to obey Miss Horton like this; but when he continued on his way he saw that he must stop unless he meant to attract the attention of the whole village, for she was dancing about like a ferret outside a rabbit burrow.

"I don't in the least want to come in, Miss Horton," he called to her. "I simply thought I would ask as I was going by how the choir practice was going?"

"Oh, quite all right, Vicar. Quite all right, thank you," Miss Horton replied excitably. "Everything is most encouraging, and every single child has turned up. You will be glad to hear that Winnie Pellow has come with the rest. I spoke seriously to her mother."

Mark turned away. He could see the faces of his scholars pressed against the window-panes of Miss Horton's sitting-room like children outside a confectioner's shop, and he did not want to distract them by his visit.

It was Mark's custom every Saturday night to eat a cold supper, which was left ready for him by his attendant family before they went away early in the afternoon to put their own cottage in order for the Sabbath. He had got into the habit of not sitting down to this lonely meal until long after his usual hour. This evening it was after half-past nine before he put down his book and went into the dining-room.

He had just lifted one of the plates that were laid upon the viands like shields upon a hero's pyre, when the front-door bell rang loudly. Without actually turning pale, Mark was as nearly being very much frightened as he had ever been since taking up his residence at the Vicarage. The echoes of the ringing seemed to repeat themselves endlessly from the empty rooms and the corridors and the uncarpeted stairs. While he was wondering who it could possibly be that would have come along that lonely valley to disturb him at this hour, the bell pealed again more loudly than before, and Mark, wishing that he had not taken off his boots and put on a pair of very flaccid slippers, braced himself to open the door. There, bobbing about in her nervousness like a benighted bird, stood Miss Horton.

"What on earth is the matter?" Mark asked crossly.

"We can sing Mass to-morrow. We can sing Mass," Miss Horton proclaimed breathlessly. "The children have been practising like little bricks, and as soon as I'd finished my supper I hurried along to tell you. Isn't it wonderful? Rover! Where are you? Good dog! Lie down quietly, there's a good boy. He was so excited at coming out with me like this. But really I was quite glad of his company. It is such an eerie road. Do you know once I felt impelled to paint Pedn Jowl. . . ."

"Paint what?" Mark exclaimed.

"That big stone like an elephant that bulges up suddenly beside the track. I found in a guide-book that it is called Pedn Jowl."

"It's called something quite different outside guide-books," Mark contradicted.

"Aren't you going to ask me in, Vicar?"

"But I'm just in the middle of my supper," he objected.

"Oh, why *do* you let those Prawles keep you waiting so late?"

"They went home after lunch. It's my own fault," Mark said.

"Nobody in the house to look after you?" Miss Horton exclaimed. "Now really I do think that is very naughty of you, and most neglectful, what's more. Oh dear, I wish I

could spare the time to come and look after you properly. You know that for a painter I'm really very domestic, and, though I oughtn't to say it, really a most capable house-keeper."

While the conversation jiggled like an ill-trimmed bicycle lamp, Mark was trying to make up his mind to invite Miss Horton to come in. He did not want her in the house at this hour of the night; but he was afraid that what was nothing more than inhospitality might be interpreted by her as the cowardice of prudery, and he was unwilling to admit the possibility of such an emotion in the circumstances. If the impersonal view he took of Miss Horton was ever to be brought home to her, he must not allow her to suppose for a moment that he could be embarrassed by the prospect of her company at any hour of the night. At the same time he must make it perfectly clear that such visits were unwelcome because they disturbed his—what?—his reading—his profound and concentrated study of mystical theology.

"Shall I stir up the salad?" Miss Horton suggested eagerly when she was seated in an armchair by the empty grate in the dining-room and Mark was engaged in swallowing down his supper as fast as he could.

"No, thank you, Miss Horton."

"It looks so sodden."

"I like sodden salads."

"Shall I cut you some more bread?"

"No, thank you, Miss Horton."

"You don't eat enough bread. I remember I was once told that the French were the most intellectual Europeans because they ate so much bread."

"Such generalizations are always rash and usually wrong," Mark snapped.

"Are you sure that the junket is all right? It looks so extremely dusty."

"Please, Miss Horton, if you're going to fuss over my eating and drinking as if I were a strange pet, I shall ask you to go and sit in the study until I've finished. I hate being fussed over. If the junket is dusty, what does it matter? Everything is more or less dusty, but it happens

to show more on a junket than on some things. Tell me about the choir practice, because I mustn't interrupt my evening's work. I'm having a stiff time with the *Mysterium Magnum* of Jacob Boehme."

"Tell me about it," said Miss Horton, with a greedy, indeed an almost libidinous interest.

"I can't possibly tell you over a supper-table about one of the most complicated expressions of human speculation. Besides, I want to hear about the choir practice. If you don't hurry up and tell me about the choir practice, I shall begin to think that it was merely an excuse to come and disturb me at this ridiculous hour of the night."

"I thought you'd be so glad to hear that the children had been learning to sing Mass," Miss Horton sighed woefully. "But you seem quite irritated over it."

"I'm very glad indeed to hear about it," Mark said. "What was irritating me was your refusal to tell me anything about it."

"Of course, we chose the simplest plainsong. You know. *I be-lieeeeve in one-ne-ne Go-o-d*. You know."

Mark repressed an impulse to make the sort of grimace one makes when somebody scrapes a knife on a plate and a secondary impulse to laugh loudly at Miss Horton's quavering chant.

"We are ready with the Ninefold Kyrie, the Creed, the Sanctus, the Agnus Dei, and the Gloria," Miss Horton announced brightly. "And now all I hope is that Tom Pascoe won't make himself unpleasant about it."

"Why should he make himself unpleasant? He brought his dismissal on himself by his behaviour last Sunday."

"Yes, I know; but it appears from what they tell me in the village that he declines to accept his dismissal at your hands."

"Does he?" Mark exclaimed, flushing darkly. "We'll see about that to-morrow. And now please, Miss Horton, you'll really have to leave me to my work. It's impossible to concentrate on the speculative subtleties of mystical theology if I begin to think about that rascal Tom Pascoe. By the way, what hymn are we having for the procession?"



"Six hundred and eleven," said Miss Horton enthusiastically, "*Hail to the Lord who comes*. It's the only one in *Ancient and Modern* for the Feast of the Purification."

"Yes, that's all right," Mark said. "I hope that some of the grown-ups will walk round the church with the children. It's a pity in one way that you'll be playing. You could have set a good example. Well, I won't invite you into the study, Miss Horton, because I really must do a little reading before I go to bed."

Mark escorted her to the door, trying to make his action appear as much as possible like a polite solicitude for the parting guest and as little as possible like the determination with which a dog expels a hen from the front lawn.

The following morning, when Mark, vested in purple cope, was giving his last instructions to the children upon the ceremony of distributing the blessed candles, he looked round for Arthur Tangye, who was not in the sacristy, and asked where he was.

The assembled children gazed at one another, each with a question in its wide eyes.

"Boy Arthur couldn't come," Susie Tangye said at last.

"Why not?"

"Mother wouldn't leave him come."

"Why not?"

There was a fresh silence, and the girls blushed.

"Has he been naughty?" Mark pressed.

"No, he hasn't been naughty," said Susie, and this time she giggled in her embarrassment.

Mark had to give it up, because at this moment William John Evans appeared in the sacristy, a cloud of indignation wreathing his usually genial countenance.

"Mr. Lidderdale, what's all this about marching round the church carrying lighted candles? Darn 'ee, 'tis all very well for children to do so, but you can't expect a grown-up sensible man to behave so foolish. 'Tisn't in reason. And will 'ee come out and settle who's going to play the harmonium? There's Tom Pascoe sitting at it and won't budge for no man, he says, and Miss Horton making faces at him fit to frighten a pig over a stile."

The last simile of the churchwarden turned Susie Tangye into a fountain of laughter. It flowed from her in a silvery stream out of the sacristy into the nave, flowed along every aisle, filled the transepts, and washed with music the darkest and dustiest corners of the church. Donald, scandalized at the outburst, frowned at his father.

"You'd never dare to talk like that if mother was by to hear 'ee," he said.

"If you talk like that to your father," William John retorted indignantly, "you'll get your ears boxed, my son."

Donald bit his nails and frowned more deeply than ever.

"There's no need for anybody who doesn't want to do so to walk in this procession," Mark said.

"Well, perhaps you'll tell my missus that?" said William John. "She've been on at me like a pickpocket, because I said I weren't a-going to, not if King and Parliament said I was."

"That's all right, William John," Mark reassured him. "I'll explain to Mrs. Evans. But you really must take some steps about Tom Pascoe. He can't be allowed to disturb the service like this. It's entirely his own fault, owing to his behaviour last Sunday, that he has lost his job as organist. I count on your loyalty. You'd better make it perfectly clear that he won't receive any support from you."

In the end Mark had to divest himself of his cope and embark on a long argument with Tom Pascoe before Mass could begin. He had the vocal assistance of Mrs. Evans, Mrs. Pellow and Miss Lambourne, whom a common hatred of Tom Pascoe united in a temporary alliance. William John Evans tried his best to keep the dispute amicable, even when Mrs. Evans declared passionately:

"If I was you, William John, I'd take him by the scruff of his neck and drag him down from that stool and heave him into the sea."

Ultimately Tom Pascoe, perceiving that the feeling of the congregation was against him, retired sullenly from his seat at the harmonium, and, muttering threats of how he would make them all pay for this morning's work, slouched out of the church.

It was not the way Mark had intended to celebrate the feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and when he was in the pulpit he was at a loss for a sermon. He did not know how to recall to his listeners that scene in the Temple at Jerusalem when the just and devout Simeon, waiting for the consolation of Israel, took the Holy Child in his arms and proclaimed Him to be the Light to lighten the Gentiles. It seemed to him that the Gentiles of Nancepean still abode in darkness and that he who should have known how to bring them the Light was like one of the foolish virgins who had forgotten her oil.

At Sunday school Arthur Tangye was still missing, and Mark, who knew how anxious he had been to secure that beautiful pale blue stamp, not to mention the blessed candle of which he had been talking all the week, could not make it out. He did not comment on Arthur's absence this time, because, supposing that he had committed some domestic crime, he did not want any of the other children to earn a purple counter of self-righteousness by revealing what it was. He rejoiced to see that the absence of Arthur had a noticeable effect on the spirits of the class, and he rejoiced still more when at the end, instead of rushing out into the road to triumph once again over the chapel Sunday school, Donald came up to him and whispered that Arthur wanted to see him.

"He's been crying all day," Donald said. "And he wanted for 'ee to go and see him, because his mother won't leave him go out of the house."

"But what's the matter?" Mark asked.

"Why, nothing much," said Donald. "Only he tore the seat of his breeches yesterday sliding on a plank, and she said she'd be ashamed for any of her children to be seen on a Sunday with torn breeches. It wouldn't have mattered so much, she said, on a week-day, but on a Sunday it was making a sight of his mother. Maid Sophie tried to mend 'em for him this morning and again this afternoon, but she couldn't make 'em meet noways."

"That was kind of Sophie," said Mark, thinking of the white counter that should shine like a star from Sophie's

money-box. "But why didn't you tell me what was wrong this morning? I would have gone and talked to Mrs. Tangye."

"It wouldn't have done no good," Donald declared. "Mrs. Tangye said she'd sooner die than leave one of her children go out like that on a Sunday."

While the rest of the class promenaded in the fading afternoon of the wintry day, Mark hurried across to the tumble-down cottage of the Tangyes, the inside of which was already dim and shadowy from the small amount of light that came through the dusty lattices. There was nobody in the living-room, and the remains of the Sunday dinner not yet cleared away added to the desolation. Mark could not help thinking that Mrs. Tangye might have stayed at home and either mended her son's breeches or made some preparation for the children's tea. As with many people who dreamed of luxury and grandeur and whose chief ambition, to hear them talk, was beauty, Mrs. Tangye's inability to acquire and achieve all she wanted led her to collapse under the disappointment and in despair of the best to suppose that she must be content with the worst. A pig would have been restless and uncomfortable in her cottage, and Mark made up his mind to lecture her severely on the vanity and hypocrisy of not allowing Arthur to be seen in a pair of torn breeches when on that same Sunday her own cottage was fifty times as disgraceful an exhibition of true indecency. On Mark's calling out to Arthur, a small and miserable voice responded from one of the rooms upstairs. He went up and found him lying face downwards on the frowsy bed that he shared with his two elder brothers.

"Why, what's the matter, Arthur? We've all missed you to-day, and I missed you most of all," Mark said, bending down and patting a tangled head of hair that was all damp from the tear-soaked pillow.

"Mother wouldn't leave me come," Arthur sobbed, "because I scat the seat of my breeches all abroad."

"By Jove, you have, haven't you?" Mark exclaimed, looking down at the rent from which the tail of poor Arthur's shirt glimmered in the deepening gloom of the attic.



"And now," Arthur moaned, turning on his back to hide the cause of his misery, "and now I won't have that blue stamp for my album. All the other boys and maids will have it, and I won't. Oh dear, 'tis too bad."

"Never mind. You'll be able to get a blue stamp next month by coming to Mass on Lady Day."

"Perhaps I shall be dead before then," Arthur sighed.

"Don't talk such nonsense. You won't be anything of the kind."

"Well, I might so well be dead," the boy persisted. "It don't seem much good in being alive if I can't never do nothing. If I'd had the best breecheses mother promised me, it wouldn't have mattered if I'd have scat these abroad. I wouldn't have had to keep home all day, and I wouldn't have missed the candles."

"Listen, Arthur," Mark said. "To-morrow is St. Blaise's Day. St. Blaise was a holy bishop and a martyr, and if you come to Mass at eight o'clock you will get his stamp. It is not a blue one, but a red one, because he was a martyr. It used to be called Little Candlemas Day, because people lighted bonfires on the hills that night. Here is a blessed candle which I have brought for you. Bring it with you to-morrow morning and you can light it at Mass, and we will offer it to God. But you must not talk any more about wanting to die, because that is not only silly, but wicked."

"Well, I don't want to die now I've got a candle," Arthur said. "I only belonged wanting to die when I hadn't got no candle. I can't have the blue stamp, can I, Mr. Lidderdale?"

"No, I'm afraid you can't have that," Mark replied. "After all, you must remember that it was through your own carelessness that you tore your breeches, and I don't think it would be fair to the others to let you have a stamp for a Mass they attended and you didn't, and to have it post-marked for a class they came to and you missed. Besides, you have an opportunity of gaining that red stamp of St. Blaise to-morrow morning, and perhaps all the children won't be able to come like you."

"Well, I hope they won't," Arthur declared frankly.

"Now, I don't think you ought to hope that," said Mark, who was wondering with what counter to penalize such a wish and supposed that a yellow one of jealousy would meet the case best.

"Well, I do hope it," Arthur insisted, "because if I belong to be the only one as goes I shall be the only one with the red stamp of St. Blazes."

"No, old chap, that's the wrong way to look at it. You can be sorry when you haven't earned a stamp which the others have earned, but you mustn't be glad when you've got one that they haven't. If you are all going to start wishing that you could be the only ones at Mass, I shall have to give up the stamp-albums, because you won't be collecting the stamps in the right spirit, and I shall feel that what Mr. Cass Dale says is true."

"What did he say?"

"Why, he told me yesterday that I was only getting you all to come to church and to Sunday school because I offered you something for it. He told me that without these stamps and other things you wouldn't come. Is that true?"

"I should belong to come whatever there was," Arthur affirmed, gazing at Mark with an expression of the utmost affection. "I told boy Donald long ago that I wanted to come even if my mother beat me for it, and when she left us come I was so happy as a piece of gold."

"Well, that's the right way to talk," Mark said. "But don't talk any more about not wanting the others to come. That's the way to earn one of the horrid yellow counters. Now, what's to be done about these breeches of yours? I hear Sophie kindly tried to sew them together."

"So she did. Only they was too much scat abroad. And once she sewed a bit of me to my shirt, and I hollered out."

"Very well, I'll speak to your mother about them. And now don't lie there moping any longer, but get up and show that you're able to take a disappointment like a man. Get up, and try to clear away the table in the sitting-room downstairs, so that when your mother comes back she'll have a pleasant surprise."

Arthur got off the tumbled bed and came stumping down-

stairs behind Mark, who left him solemnly dealing with the disorder in the twilit room.

The next morning Donald and Arthur arrived beaming at the Vicarage to escort Mark to Mass, at which they were the only ones present. Donald volunteered to help Arthur with the serving, as it seemed a good opportunity for him to try his hand at it when there was nobody else present to be scandalized by any mistakes he made.

Mark began to think that after all the light was burning in Nancepean, when he watched the two boys walking slowly back up Pendhu hill to breakfast and school and pausing from time to time to gloat on the bright red stamps whereon was printed the picture of St. Blaise holding in one hand the woolcomber with which the flesh was torn from his bones because he would not deny his Saviour, and in the other a curly taper to symbolize the burning and shining light he was when Diocletian persecuted the Christians of Cappadocia.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE TANGYE BAPTISM

MRS. TANGYE herself celebrated the feast of St. Blaise by producing a pair of female twins with the reddest hair yet seen in the family. If Mrs. Tangye felt important when the time was drawing near to receive her weekly wage for cleaning the chapel, she felt a good deal more important when she produced a baby, but when, as on the present occasion, she achieved twins, an event of which the oldest inhabitant could recall no tradition of ever having happened in Nancepean, she touched a pinnacle of importance that she was unlikely to reach again until she mounted to the cynosure of widowhood. Even her husband shared in a minor degree her glory and was made extremely drunk by the number of rums that to mark the occasion Joe Dunstan insisted on standing him at the Hanover Inn. Fertility in man or beast was esteemed by Joe Dunstan above everything. Bill Tangye's lapse was made the subject of a powerful address by old Sam Dale the following Sunday evening in chapel, the news of which did not abash Mrs. Tangye in the least. Indeed, if anything, it added one more proof of how very much she was the temporary pivot on which the wheel of village life revolved.

Mark went to see her about a week later, by which time Bill Tangye had fallen back into his wambling insignificance, from which the birth of the twins had temporarily raised him. Mrs. Tangye was still in bed, but she was unusually bright and conversational even for her, and the two little baby girls on either side of her looked as round and small and wrinkled and vividly coloured as a couple of tangerines. Mark did not notice the pun when he first discovered this resemblance, and he wondered afterwards how much the



subconscious play of words had been responsible for perceiving it.

"Well, Mrs. Tangye, I'm glad to see you looking so well already."

"Yes, Mr. Lidderdale, Dr. Bancroft was quite surprised when he saw the progress I was making. Did you know that I'd had the doctor come out from Rosemarket?"

The decision of the village wise women to summon the doctor and not depend on the services of the district nurse had been a conspicuous item in Mrs. Tangye's triumph.

Mark was able to gratify her by saying he had heard of the doctor's arrival.

"Well, I believe it was talked of quite a lot," Mrs. Tangye said complacently. "He's a very nice man, Dr. Bancroft. But there, I expect you do know him well."

Mark shook his head.

"Don't you, indeed? Well, that is funny. He drove up in his motor-car, and I felt a bit uncomfortable when he was examining me, because the children kept on blowing his horn all the time. I think it upset him a bit, because he turned round quite sharp once and tried to look out of the window to see who it was. Only, ever since Walter and Jimmie nailed it up after the frame fell out, anyone can't really see properly out of it. But certainly I found Dr. Bancroft very civil and obliging, and when he took off his fur coat he asked me so polite if I'd mind him hanging it over the foot of the bed. 'Well,' as I said to Mrs. Wilton when she popped round to see me, 'there's one thing about Dr. Bancroft, he don't speak to anybody as if they was a log of wood.'"

"Can't anything be done about your window?" Mark inquired. He was beginning to find the air of this attic under the mouldering thatch rather too heavy.

"No, I spoke to Mr. Jago about it more than once, and he promised he'd get old Mr. Pascoe to come and look at it, but old Mr. Pascoe belongs to be so busy always. He's been nine years going to mend Mrs. Woodses' gate, and never found the time yet. Still, if the cottage is a bit tumbledown, 'tis very central. I believe Mr. Lidderdale would open his

eyes if I told him how many people have found time to run in and have a look at my two babies."

Mark was not so much astonished as Mrs. Tangye hoped.

"What are you going to call them?" he asked.

"Ah, there! Now you really have asked me something. I'd been intending for some time past to call it Lydia if it was a girl after a great-aunt of mine who lived over to Penzance. But I never reckoned on two girls, and I've been worrying to think of a name to go with Lydia. It wouldn't hardly do to call one of them Lydia and give the other some such name as Jane or Mary. I had another little girl who died and which was called Rhoda, but anybody don't like to call one sister after another. But in a way I'm sorry now I did call her Rhoda, because she only lived six weeks, poor little thing, and you may say it was a nice name gone to waste."

"Well, there are plenty of other names to match Lydia," Mark said. "How about Delia or Celia or Julia or Cynthia or Flavia?"

"Flavia," Mrs. Tangye echoed. "I never call to mind that name. I've heard of 'flavour,' of course, but not for a name. What was the first one Mr. Lidderdale said?"

"Delia or Celia, I think."

"'Tis a pity now I fixed on Lydia, because I might have called the one Delia and t'other Celia. Only perhaps that would make a bit of confusion between them, especially them being twins. Perhaps I'd better stick to Lydia, especially as it was my great-aunt's name."

"I should call the other Celia," Mark advised.

"Well, 'tis certainly out of the common," Mrs. Tangye agreed. "And if she ever come to be a great-aunt herself, it 'ud make a nice uncommon name for her niece to give one of her babies."

Mrs. Tangye's imagination had leaped forward, and her glasses glittered at the prospect of a long line of nieces trailing down through the distant future, all of them as fertile as herself.

"I've brought you a small present, Mrs. Tangye," said Mark, offering her a parcel. "I didn't think that with your

new responsibilities you'd have much time to mend Arthur's knickerbockers well enough for Sundays, and so I managed to find a pair of blue serge ones that I think will fit him."

It struck Mark that there was just the faintest shadow of disappointment over Mrs. Tangye's thanks, as if when he first produced the small parcel she had anticipated some more personal tribute to celebrate her achievement. However, it was not long before she managed to regard the gift as an attention to herself and to acquire from the presentation of it an even richer pompousness of demeanour and outlook.

"Of course, I should like to have the both of them christened to church," she said importantly.

"Please don't think it necessary to do that because I've bought you a pair of knickerbockers for Arthur. And don't think that your two little girls will add anything wonderful to the Church. I shall be happy to baptize them, but you must clearly understand that, if I do baptize them, they and you and their godfathers and godmothers will have a great responsibility."

Mark was rather vexed with himself for having taken this opportunity to present Mrs. Tangye with the knickerbockers for Arthur. The last thing in the world he wanted was to give her the slightest impression that he was trying to bribe her to bring her infants to the font. Yet, after all, was he not wrong himself in considering anything except his duty toward those two little tangerine-headed babies lying there?

So it fell out that about three weeks later on a Lenten grey Sunday morning Lydia and Celia Tangye were made lively members of Christ's holy Church. Mark decided to let attendance at the Baptism count as an attendance at Sunday school, because he thought that an object-lesson in the administration of a sacrament would impress itself a good deal more than an hour's theoretical talking. Major Drumgold had been stirring up opposition to Mark's way of conducting the services, and had already written two or three times to the Bishop about the lack of respect he accorded to Morning Prayer; and, having found out that it

annoyed his Vicar, he had taken to attending Morning Prayer in order to stalk out of church in the middle of Mass. Mark was glad of an opportunity to obey one of the rubrics implicitly, and he rather fancied that the Major might protest against his interrupting Morning Prayer to administer Baptism after the Second Lesson.

It is scarcely necessary to say that Miss Horton was one of the godmothers. The other three were Mrs. Wilton, Miss Lambourne, and an extraordinary woman imported one would fancy with a considerable amount of difficulty from Rosemarket. This woman, a Mrs. Trebilcock, had a very loud sniff, which sent Susie Tangye into such an ecstasy of merriment that she had to retire from the baptismal procession and recover herself in the sacristy. But she had no sooner recovered from the effect of Mrs. Trebilcock's sniff than she was thrown into fresh fits of irrepressible laughter first by the yells of Celia and Lydia and then by Miss Horton's handling of her particular goddaughter.

Mrs. Tangye probably never enjoyed herself so much in her life. To have the whole service in church held up while public attention was concentrated upon herself and her offspring was really wonderful, and she could not sufficiently congratulate herself upon her foresight in securing Mrs. Trebilcock as a godmother, because Mrs. Trebilcock would undoubtedly spread the news of such an impressive baptism all over Rosemarket. She had already been looking forward to the delight of relating to various friends she should meet on the first day she went marketing the various details of the birth of her twins, and now to this would be added an account of the Baptism, while as a guarantee that she was not exaggerating she should be able to refer her listeners to Mrs. Trebilcock's testimony.

"Let me see," she said to Mark, when Mass was over and she was receiving the congratulations of everybody upon the quietness of her daughters for the last hour. "Let me see, 'tis quite right what the children said about there not being any Sunday school this afternoon?"

"Yes, I understood from Sophie and Susie that you were having a large tea-party, Mrs. Tangye, and would require



their help in the preparations. So I said that attendance at the Baptism could count instead."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Lidderdale. Yes, I shall be glad of their help. I've got a parcel of folks coming in, and I wanted my friend Mrs. Trebilcock to see a bit of Nancepean. It's seldom she gets the chance to leave Rosemarket for the whole day."

"I hope you haven't spent too much money on this tea," Mark said a little severely. "With all these children you can't afford such extravagances."

"Just a few cakes and things," said Mrs. Tangye vaguely. "Well, I shall be getting my chapel money next week. Now, Susie, leave the babies alone, you naughty girl. You'll get me so hurried in a moment, I won't know which is which."

"Don't you love babies, Vicar?" Miss Horton exclaimed over Mrs. Tangye's shoulder at this moment.

Mark pretended that he supposed her to be asking somebody else this question.

"Come now, Mrs. Tangye, if you're going to drive back with the missus," William John shouted from the churchyard gate.

"Mr. Evans kindly said he'd drive me back," Mrs. Tangye proclaimed in a voice dazed by the attention she was receiving.

That evening Toby Prawle, who had gone to Chypie to interview a farmer about a fox that was reported to be committing havoc among his poultry, brought Mark a note from Major Drumgold.

Angarrack,  
Chypie R.S.O.,  
Cornwall.  
March 2, 1913.

Dear Lidderdale,

I have already spoken to you on several occasions and written to you more than once to remonstrate with you on the way you conduct Mattins. I have also very reluctantly written to the Bishop and protested against your methods of taking the services. This morning you exceeded the

bounds by introducing an immensely long Baptism into the middle of Mattins, so that even though, as you know, I never stay for the second service, I did not get back to Angarrack until nearly one o'clock. Considering that in spite of my protests you persist in holding Mattins at half-past ten instead of eleven o'clock, the hour to which most of us are accustomed, I consider that one o'clock is a monstrous hour to reach home. It was particularly annoying this morning as my wife was anxious to take the opportunity of our having a cook to go for a walk with me. Moreover, I must remark that there is something particularly objectionable and almost irreverent in having a baptism in the middle of a public service. I noticed that several of the children were giggling in a very unseemly way, and I am sorry that attendance at the Church Sunday school has not yet succeeded in making them behave any better in church. Mrs. Tangye is as much entitled as any of us to have her children christened. Poor woman, I know she has a very hard struggle to make both ends meet, and on several occasions I have been able and glad to help her with vegetables, but I must protest against her christening being made almost a parochial matter simply because several of her children have been persuaded to attend Church Sunday school. I do not wish to impute to you any unworthy motives, but do you not realize yourself that you are exposing yourself to criticism by spoiling Mrs. Tangye in this way?

It doesn't matter so much what you do on week-days. For instance, I heard on very good authority that you actually covered yourself and young Donald Evans with cinders on Ash Wednesday. But I said nothing. In fact, when several of the farmers came to me and asked what they ought to do, I advised them to keep quiet and as good as told them that it was no business of theirs what you did on a week-day. But Sunday is another matter. You have no business to flout the religious susceptibilities of your parishioners on a Sunday. Sunday belongs as much to us as to you, and I think you ought to realize that you are driving people away from church by your extreme behaviour. Cannot you bring yourself to make a few con-

cessions for the sake of the religion of which you are a minister?

I am writing to you this afternoon in the friendliest spirit in the hope that you may feel in the mood to listen to what I say. I do not intend to write to the Bishop about holding this baptism in the middle of Mattins, because though he has acknowledged my last three letters he has not answered them, and I am hoping that another personal appeal to your better feelings may effect more. Easter will soon be upon us. On referring to my diary I find that it will fall exactly three weeks to-day. At Easter we shall have a lot of visitors, and I do beg you to behave with a little moderation. You cannot expect them to attend services like the one this morning. Moreover, your example has inspired Kennedy to imitate you at Chypie, and with the Vicar of Lanyon suffering from paralysis, which makes his services unpleasant to attend for another reason, what is going to happen? You must realize that we cannot afford to drive people away. Our Gold Club depends for its prosperity on the holiday seasons, and Nancepean, not to mention Lanyon and Chypie, depend a great deal on the money that the visitors bring. I feel sure that when you look at matters from this point of view, which may not have struck you, you will do something to help us all and thereby make religion mean something, for if it does not mean helping one another, what does it mean? I am a plain man and cannot remember the text I should like to quote, but I know there is a text on this subject. Well, I haven't written such a long letter since I got engaged to my wife and was ordered abroad next day. I hope that now we have what promises to be an excellent cook, you will come up and have supper with us and a little bridge. I should not like to feel that our religious differences were going to be a barrier to social intercourse, and I think you'll agree that I am trying to act fairly by you in advising everybody to let you do as you like on week-days provided you give us what we want on Sundays.

Yours sincerely,

Henry H. Drumgold.

To which Mark replied:

Dear Drumgold,

If you will refer to your Prayer Book under "The Ministration of Publick Baptism of Infants to be used in the Church," you will read in the rubrics at the beginning a particular recommendation to administer baptism exactly as I administered it this morning. To be sure as an alternative the Evening Service is suggested, but you could not expect Mrs. Tangye to bring her twins on a blowy March night all the way from Nancepean to Church Cove. As you have several times implored me to stick to the Prayer Book, you ought to give me credit when I do.

With regard to changing my services to suit the Easter visitors, you surely cannot believe that I will do that. I am not indulging myself in extravagant behaviour to amuse myself, but because I believe that what I am doing is right, and I hesitate to say what I think of your suggestion that I should turn the worship of Almighty God into an additional attraction for holiday-makers. I am sorry to have to reply to your letter, the good feeling of which I recognize, in this intransigent way, but it is fairer to you and to myself that I should make my position perfectly clear.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Lidderdale.



## CHAPTER IX

### THE STONE ALTAR

MARK had been hoping very much that the stone altar presented by Drogo Mortemer would be in place before Easter, and when Stephen Crutchley's men arrived on the Friday of Passion week he knew that his hope would be fulfilled. They worked hard on the great granite blocks, but it was necessary to sing the Mass of Palm Sunday at the old wooden altar, which had been removed and set up again in the Lady Chapel.

Mark knew that he was going to have a difficult time this Easter, and he was glad that all the fusses in connexion with the church were likely to be brought to a head at the Easter Vestry. What would be called interfering with the fabric by putting in this new altar would be merged with such outrages upon the simple piety of the visitors as the distribution of blessed palms, the Adoration of the Cross, and the Mass of the Presanctified.

Palm Sunday passed off more or less tranquilly, chiefly because it had been assiduously put about that the new Vicar was going to ride round the church on a donkey, and when this remarkable feat was not attempted the other ceremonies seemed a little tame. Moreover, the fact that all the crucifixes, images, and sacred pictures were veiled made the half-erected stone altar under its sackcloth less conspicuous, so that nobody realized yet what the new Vicar was going to do. Mark had settled first of all that the children should go out and cut those branches of willow-buds that are called palms instead of sending up to an ecclesiastical furnisher for those desiccated crosses woven out of the dried fronds of real palms. Then he had an inspiration. Why not cut the fronds from one of the many fine old palms planted by his grandfather in the Vicarage garden? This was done,

and the procession before Mass, in which each child carried an immense frond of *Phoenix Canariensis* green and fresh and glittering, would have been hard to beat in churches much wealthier and much better equipped than this little church by the sea.

Major Drumgold was present with a party of visitors, and stayed till the end of Mass in order to introduce them to Mark, perhaps in the hope that when Mark saw what fashion and charm could be produced by the Golf Club at holiday-time he would relent from his intention of ramming the red-hot poker of Popery down their throats. Mark, however, was only aware of a bunch of inquisitive and patronizing women whose counterparts might be seen in the vicinity of any bandstand on the South Coast. His nerves were in no trim to respond to their inane small-talk, to their enthusiasm about the position of the church, and to their lamentations over the earliness of Easter this year. Major Drumgold, seeing that they were not having the success he had hoped, suggested that they should walk on and that he should catch them up.

"Awfully nice woman, Mrs. Gladwyn. Her husband's brother is governor of—oh lord, I've forgotten where, but you know where I mean, one of our colonies. Her daughter writes. Very successfully too, I believe. The tall woman is a Mrs. Hart. She has a house in Brook Street. Very wealthy, I believe. That's what I say about the Golf Club. We do get such an awfully decent set of people—particularly at Easter. Deuced pity it's so early this year. We're apt to have such rotten weather about now. I say, old chap, where did you get all those blessed palms from?"

"You mean bless'd palms," said Mark, with a smile. "Why, the children cut them in the Vicarage garden."

"What?" Drumgold shouted. "I say, what awful desecration! You know what I mean? Why, those palms of yours are the finest in Cornwall. I say, it's absolute Vandalism!"

The Major mopped his forehead. He really was profoundly moved.

"You give your vegetable marrows, Drumgold. Why shouldn't I give my palms?"

"But you can't cut a specimen Whatsitsname—oh, it's no use arguing with you. You're a fanátic. That's what you are. A fánatic. But seriously, old chap, I do beg you to go steady during Easter. It's going to mean the very deuce of a row, if you don't. Look here, I don't hold with your practices, but we keep friendly. You know what I mean? I write you a real snorter now and again, but we can be polite to one another in public. And I'm advising you for your good. The people are getting angry. They are really. You can't drive a Cornishman. You know what I mean? He won't be driven. He's obstinate. And you'll be up against it in a minute. There's talk of getting up a petition to the Bishop. Go steady for a bit. I was awfully delighted when you decided not to ride round the church this morning on that donkey. I was really. 'By Jove, Drumgold,' I said to myself, 'he's beginning to see that it won't do.'"

Mark wondered if it was worth while explaining that there had never been any question of his riding on a donkey, but he decided that it was not.

"By the way," the Major went on, "what on earth induced you to have the second service at the side of the church like that?"

"The new altar isn't quite finished yet," Mark replied.

"New altar? What new altar?"

"The new altar that is being put in. It has been presented to the church by a generous donor who prefers to remain anonymous."

"Look here," said Drumgold earnestly. "Why do a thing like that? You know how conservative the Cornishmen are. You know what'll happen. As soon as you've put it up, a couple of fellows will come out from the village one night and dig it up and throw it over the cliff."

"I don't think so, Drumgold," said Mark.

"Well, you mark my words, old chap, they will. And you'll remember that I warned you. However, I might as well argue with a gatepost. You're going to have a very troublesome Easter vestry, you know."

"I'm sure I am," Mark said.

"What I don't understand about you," Drumgold went on, "is that you don't seem able to grasp that by carrying on as you're doing you're wounding the religious feelings of everybody who doesn't happen to see eye to eye with yourself. You can't expect these visitors not to feel sore about it."

"Are you closing the links on Good Friday?" Mark asked.

"No, we're not closing. You see, a lot of people only get down on Thursday night and have to get back on Easter Tuesday, and it's hardly fair to deprive them of two days' golf. Personally, I shouldn't mind opening the links on Sundays, but the people here would resent it, and so I put my own feelings on one side."

"Well, Drumgold, if you don't see the necessity of closing the links on Good Friday, I'm afraid you won't find it very easy to convince me that many of your precious visitors possess these deep religious feelings that can be injured by my ecclesiastical behaviour."

The new altar was finished on the Wednesday of Holy Week, and Mark was half unwilling to hang the dossal of austere red damask lest even that should detract a little from the stark and massive solemnity of the bare stone. It was good to see the way that the great square altar improved the appearance of the church, and now if only one could abolish those hideous pews of pitch-pine and replace them with a few rush-seated praying-chairs—a dozen would be ample for present accommodation—what an improvement that would be! And what an outcry it would raise! No wood had quite the appeal of pitch-pine to simple folk. One might almost use pitch-pine as the dividing line between two broad categories of taste. Had the old altar, now in the Lady Chapel, been made of pitch-pine instead of ordinary deal, it might have been impossible to placate the parish over its removal. What was there in these strata of fossilized treacle that touched the commonplace imagination so profoundly? Perhaps it was that, like an arum or a big Japanese chrysanthemum, the wood scarcely seemed real. It



transcended both nature and art. Yes, it was lucky that the old altar was only made of deal.

Mark tried not to be sorry that Miss Horton came to Tenebrae that Wednesday night, tried not to read the psalms in such a way as to cut her out of her eager responses, tried not to wish that Donald could snuff her out as one by one he snuffed out the tawny penitential candles of unbleached wax. Without Miss Horton and her solitary impenitent candle of creamy paraffin the nave of the church would have been empty, and the ancient Office, which to Mark more than any of the more dramatic ceremonial of Holy Week expressed those heavy days and nights before the Crucifixion, would have given him the full value of solemn foreboding. By an effort he compelled himself not to notice Miss Horton's presence nor, when it forced itself upon him in spite of everything, to resent it, but to rejoice that at least one woman in Nancepean had taken the trouble to come out and worship her Saviour.

Gradually Mark became oblivious of Miss Horton, as one after another the candles were extinguished. Gradually, above the muttering of the psalms, the muttering of the flowing tide was audible and the antiphons of the waves breaking upon the beach. As the illumination grew less and the sound of the sea more loud, Mark noticed that Arthur Tangye looked nervously at Donald once or twice, as if he would be reassured of their safety inside the church. Mark beckoned to Donald.

"Let Arthur put out the last five candles," he whispered. And "a blue counter for Donald," he thought, when the boy made no sign of discontent at being deprived of a duty he cherished.

With the slow invasion of the grey moonlight the great stone altar seemed to take on an added bulk as if the elemental nature of the granite could assert itself in spite of the Divine uses to which it had been hewn. Heriot had not been successful in obtaining any relics of even one martyr, nor had the altar been consecrated. Mark began to regret that he had not applied for a faculty and secured the Bishop's good will. There was something strange about that altar.

He had the queer fancy of a great beast saddled, but not yet tamed. To-morrow he should say his first Mass on the new altar, and he was glad to think that the first Mass offered upon it would be on Maundy Thursday, would be that wonderful white Mass which breaks like a ray of sunlight through the clouds of Passiontide. The elemental hostility would surely vanish then.

Mark had wanted to take advantage of the walk home in the moonlight to impress upon Donald and Arthur the meaning of the great drama of Holy Week in which they were playing their parts. Donald did appear to have some inkling of the profundities that in her wisdom the Church did not attempt to express save by ceremonies that nobody could mistake for anything but infinitely attenuated shadows of the reality. What Arthur made of it all was difficult to find out. Mark, remembering some of his own childish experiences, wanted to believe that the little boy was being drawn nearer to God by one of those revelations of His Love that He makes to children. Yet there was nothing in Arthur's replies in class or in his conversation outside to indicate that he had the least idea what this strange religion meant. He had been drawn into it as a child might be drawn into fairyland. The putting on of a surplice, the putting out of a candle, best of all the solemn holding of the incense-boat were all a projection into real life of a delightful game of make-believe. It was like dreaming of being a soldier and suddenly finding yourself a drummer boy, the centre of an admiring and curious crowd of other little boys. But would it take him anywhere, or would he grow out of it as one grew out of fairylands however spacious they might once have seemed? That was a sad question to be asking oneself, Mark thought. "And I who ask it," he said to himself, "am daring to grumble because we shall have Miss Horton's company all the way home."

Mark tried to be pleasant with her, and he must have been fairly successful, because Miss Horton became more and more excited all the way up Pendhu hill, even rising to the height of telling him about a picture she felt inspired to paint as soon as the weather was settled. Up the hill they

went, Mark listening sympathetically, Miss Horton eloquently pictorial and falling now over her bicycle, now over her dog, the two boys murmuring to each other those boyish secrets which have a mystery that the secrets of little girls achieve never.

## CHAPTER X

### GOOD FRIDAY

ON the morning of Good Friday, one of those rather blue days of Spring that Good Friday so often gives, even when Easter is grey and stormy, there were a good many visitors in church, including the bunch of four schoolmasters that spent all their vacations playing golf and lodging with the Martins at Nankervis farm. One of them, a burly man, with a large black beard, was wearing a conspicuously, an almost blatantly comfortable Norfolk suit that gave him the appearance of an unbraced and unbuttoned ogre. This must be the redoubtable Mr. Ringer, whose advent had been sighed for at the Golf Club as being the one man who really would be able to put this ass of a new Vicar in his place. In order not to miss even the least obvious of Mark's "goings on," Mr. Ringer had donned a pair of gold-rimmed glasses, over which he glared in turn at every member of the congregation as if he or she was one of his scholars, until at last he concentrated his appalling gaze on the bad boy of the school, wagging his arms behind his back as if he were reaching somewhere in the folds of an imaginary gown for an imaginary cane. From time to time he made half-audible comments on the proceedings to his companions, who sniffed and sneered and smiled to themselves with the conscious superiority of pedagogues. While Mark was reading the prayers, Mr. Ringer assumed the kind of expression he would have assumed if the culprit were in his class and construing a piece of Livy he had not prepared.

Mark was worn out by relentless fasting and the strain of trying to carry through single-handed the elaborate services of the season, not to mention the anxiety of getting the new altar into its place and the effort he had made to be charitable both in thought and speech to a number of people



toward whom he felt precious little charity. Suddenly in the presence of that big black-bearded man in a Norfolk suit with his three sniggering companions he felt that he could not go through with the ceremony of creeping to the Cross; and that if he tried he should be tempted to snatch the Crucifix up and use it as a weapon to drive them and all that staring crowd of holiday-makers out of the church.

"Gadarene swine!" he murmured to himself, and in that moment he felt a hatred of human nature that was as fierce as the love that flames in the heart of a converted soul.

After the Mass of the Presanctified, Mark waited in the sacristy until the congregation had dispersed and then climbed up the Castle Cliff and sat on a tussock of thrift, overlooking Dollar Cove and the outspread sea of hyaline.

"It was like Peter, but twenty thousand times as base a cowardice," he thought. Turning from the serenity of the sky and the wide stretches of golden sand growing wider as the sea retreated from them as quietly as a withdrawn veil, he buried his face in the grass. How should he after such a betrayal of his Saviour dare to go back into the church presently and preach the Devotion of the Three Hours? Now that he looked back on his sudden abandonment of creeping to the Cross he found his conduct inexplicable. In all his life he could remember no action of his which appeared so contemptible, so humiliating. To have been frightened by the attitude of four pedagogues! To have collapsed under the strain of a self-consciousness provoked by the pince-nez of a burly man with a black beard and an ill-fitting Norfolk suit!

After a while the infinitely various earthy odours and the cool grassiness of the place allayed his feverish regrets. He began to exist in the miniature world six inches from his face, and in a sudden amazement at the wealth of various colours in a vernal squill when regarded so intently he lost himself. When he emerged again from this microcosm, summoned back by the shouts of the people gathering limpets on the beach according to an ancient custom of celebrating the low spring tide of Good Friday, Mark felt that

the stain of his cowardice had been obliterated by the Eternal Love of God.

The congregation was much smaller for the Three Hours, and the two or three female visitors who were present had obviously come neither out of inquisitiveness nor conventionality, but because they genuinely desired to stand for a little while on Calvary and look up where the Saviour of the world hung upon the Cross.

Soon after Mark had reached the sixth word at about a quarter-past two, his preaching was interrupted by talk and laughter that came floating into the church through the sunny windows from the direction of the thirteenth hole on the low cliffs, just beyond the northerly wall of the churchyard.

*"It is finished.* The agony was accomplished. God's will to save the world was fulfilled. Surely the least imaginative of His creatures must be awed by the simplicity of that final statement when he remembers. . . ."

Another burst of laughter invaded the church. Mark broke off abruptly, and, descending from the pulpit, hurried outside and across the churchyard. He had not stopped to consider who it might be on the thirteenth green, but when he saw that it was Mr. Ringer with his three companions, he felt like Samson reckless unto death if only he might slay these Philistines. While he was drawing nearer to the four-some, he was dimly conscious above the beating of his heart that the two caddies were the eldest Tangye boys, so that whatever he should say and whatever he should do would be reported with suitable exaggeration in the village. Mr. Ringer and his companions watched Mark's approach in cassock and cotta and black stole with the kind of puzzled contempt with which four small boys watch another small boy's kite flopping along the ground instead of soaring as it should.

"Do you mind clearing away from here?" Mark said, pale as his cotta. "You may not realize it, but you are disturbing the service with your chattering and laughter."

"Oh, this is very rich. This is very rich indeed," Mr. Ringer proclaimed to his companions. "I was not aware

that the—er—Lanyon golf-links came within the—er—local ecclesiastical jurisdiction—um—aw—um. Have we made a mistake, caddie? Have we made a mistake, Matthieson? Is this by any chance not the thirteenth hole, Scrymgeour? I think it is your stroke, Brownlow—um—aw—um. You had better hurry up. You are annoying the Vicar.”

“I haven’t the time to spare for argument now,” Mark went on in cold wrath. “Your objectionable behaviour out here fetched me down from the pulpit. You, sir! It’s you, sir, I’m talking to,” he added sharply to Mr. Ringer, who was staring at him over his putter as in the picture-book Blunderbore stares at Jack the Giant Killer over his club. “I believe you’re a schoolmaster. You should have learned by now to set a better example both inside a church and outside a church. This is Good Friday, and not the time for middle-aged schoolmasters to be playing about like urchins in the gutter. Please take yourselves off from this green.”

Mr. Ringer was drawing in his breath to deliver a ponderous sarcasm; but Mark quickly picked up the two balls and flung them as far as he could in the direction of the towans.

“I’m not quite sure where the fourteenth hole is,” he said. “But it’s somewhere in that direction, and you may be able to walk as far without laughing, especially as you, sir,” he turned on Mr. Ringer, “whom I take to be the humorist of the party, do not look now as if you were particularly amused.”

Mark turned on his heels and went back into the church.

In the afternoon about tea-time Drumgold called at the Vicarage dressed, much to Mark’s amusement, in a black suit, for it struck him that this was put on rather to symbolize the enormity of his behaviour toward Mr. Ringer than to commemorate the solemnity of the day.

“I say, Lidderdale,” he began at once, “I’ve come over to see what can be done about the dreadful affair this afternoon. The first account I heard said that you’d knocked Ringer over the cliffs, and I was most awfully relieved to

hear from his own lips that you had not gone quite as far as that."

"I probably should have had a good try to knock him over on any other day," Mark said.

"Oh, come now, Lidderdale, you ought not to talk like that even in jest. It's really a very serious matter. I fear that nothing can stop Ringer from writing to the Bishop about it, though I'll do my best if you'll let me have a note of apology. You could say that you didn't realize who he was."

"But I did. I told him so. The only thing I didn't realize was that he was quite such a cad."

"My dear fellow, the whole Club is up in arms against you," Drumgold said, curling his little red moustache in extreme agitation.

"I'm not a member of it."

"No, I know, it is such a pity you don't join us. We're such an awfully jolly crowd. You know what I mean? And you can always get tea there."

Upset though he was by the terrible occurrence, the Major's pride in the amenities of the Golf Club was undaunted.

"That reminds me," Mark said. "Wouldn't you like some tea now?"

"My dear fellow, I couldn't touch it. I'm too upset. If it had been anybody but Ringer! He's such a capital chap. So's Scrymgeour. So's Brownlow. So's Matthieson. They're all masters at Upton. Jolly good school! If I had a youngster, I'd send him to Upton like a shot. Very healthy tone, Ringer tells me. Of course, you started off by aggravating him at the service this morning."

"Well, if you won't have any tea and if I'm not going to pay the slightest attention to our friend Mr. Ringer, there doesn't seem much point in prolonging this conversation, Drumgold. I've got a service in the Parish Hall at six o'clock, and I want to rest for an hour. We can argue it out at the Easter vestry next week. I shan't be so tired, and you'll have plenty of parishioners to support you."

Mark had felt that he ought to hold a mission service in



the Parish Hall, so that nobody could complain that on Good Friday he had been kept from worship by the eccentricities of his Vicar.

But there were no new faces, and he found it very difficult to repeat with any emotion what he had already said to everybody present. And after the service he had a disappointment, because Mrs. Evans declared that Donald had been using his bad leg too much to-day and must not go all the way down to church again for Tenebrae. Mrs. Tangye, on hearing this, had to assert her importance by forbidding Arthur to go either, and Mark was faced with the prospect of saying Tenebrae with only Miss Horton beside himself in the church, and, worse than that, of having her company on the road there and back. He nearly told her that he should not say Tenebrae to-night; but he could not quite bring himself to do this, although he did insist that he should be allowed to walk down alone and that Miss Horton should ride her bicycle.

An immense fatigue came over Mark while he was saying the long psalms, and each time he rose to extinguish one of the candles he felt that he could scarcely drag himself back to his stall.

At last the moment came to remove the fifteenth candle, and just as Mark did so Miss Horton managed to knock her own solitary candle off the ledge of the pew in which she was, thereby plunging the church into darkness at the very moment when a wave leapt forward from the flowing tide and crashed in thunder against the wall of the churchyard. The darkness was not so absolute as it had seemed when it first came. Although the moon was scarcely up and already heavily obscured by clouds, a mist of grey stole through the windows; and the fifteenth candle, hidden behind the dossal but still alight, shone dimly through the red damask and cast upon the altar a shadowy stain of blood. But Mark could not rise from his stall to bring it into the chancel according to the ritual of Tenebrae. He sat paralyzed, while the wind rose moaning and crept through the church so that the hidden candle flickered in the draught and gave to the shadowy stain an illusory semblance of blood

flowing down over the altar. Again Mark tried to rise, but without success; and he began to ask himself if he really was paralyzed. He wondered if he was even any longer capable of speech; but he feared to make trial of his voice lest Miss Horton should come to see what was the matter with him. And again with a tremendous effort he strove in a nightmare sweat to rise from his stall. It was useless. He was as immovable as the new altar. This was the result of fasting too severely and of overtaking his strength with long services that nobody wanted. For an instant he was the prey of self-pity; but he fought off that particular demon, that clammy-fingered demon with a body spongy as a bat's.

"But I have overtired myself," he thought with such conviction that he fancied he had uttered his thought aloud and dreaded to see Miss Horton emerging from the shimmering gloom beyond the chancel to give him her help.

"Why can't that damned woman leave me alone? Why must she be the only person in Nancepean who enjoys herself in church? Am I thinking hard or talking aloud?" he asked himself.

The waves were thundering against the churchyard wall.

"That's a heavy swell coming in before a gale," he thought. "An equinoctial gale."

The phrase gave him pleasure to repeat to himself over and over again. It seemed a proof that he was still capable of reason. It even struck him as a very profound piece of natural observation. An equinoctial gale. He must not forget it later on, but for the moment he must concentrate upon rising from his stall and bringing in the last candle and making that noise at the end of *Tenebrae* which signifies the convulsion of nature after the death of Jesus Christ. He must beat upon the choir-stalls and stamp his foot. Perhaps that was why the waves were crashing so loudly against the churchyard wall. They were taking his place. And the obscured moon was the hidden Light of the world. Or was that the pathetic fallacy? It was. Of course, it was. It was a weakness of his own imagination to excuse himself for not rising from this stall and bringing out the lighted

candle from behind the altar as he should. And what was going to happen if he did not get up soon? That woman would not go on sitting quietly down there for ever, though no doubt she was ashamed of herself for clumsily knocking over her candle like that and would stay quiet for a while. Or had it really been an accident? Had it not perhaps been a plot to give her an excuse to come stealing up out of the darkness on the plea that he was ill and required help? He must not faint. He must not on any account lose consciousness absolutely. Miss Horton would go out to fetch assistance, and the nearest house was Nankervis, where those infernal schoolmasters were staying.

"I will not faint."

But everything round him was losing substantial form. The whole church was tremulous as the shadow of a tree in a windy moonlight. Even the new altar set up to endure for ever was turning to blood and water. Out of His side came blood and water.

"I have pierced His side with a spear, for this morning I have denied Him. I feared that black-bearded servant of the high priest and denied Him. I feared to take off my shoes and kiss the feet of my crucified Saviour lest that burly pedagogue should laugh."

It was not a feverish delusion. The altar really was melting. . . .

"The sea must not sweep us into oblivion. The sea must be kept out of the church. I can feel the spray—the spray—the—what is the matter, Miss Horton? Go away! Why on earth are you bending over me like that?"

"You fainted, Vicar. You fainted completely away, and I was sprinkling you with the only water I could find, which happened to be holy water."

Mark tried to pretend that it was quite an ordinary occurrence for a priest to faint in church like this, because he knew that unless he did so Miss Horton would construct an epic from a slip of the tongue. At the same time, he really did feel grateful to her for not rushing off in a state of excitement to fetch outside help.

"I wish you'd take my arm," she said when they came out

of church, "and let me walk back with you to the Vicarage."

But Mark was neither weak enough nor grateful enough to do this.

"No, no, Miss Horton. Thank you very much, but I am perfectly able to get back alone along the valley. Besides, you have your bicycle to support, and your dog to look after. By the way, what's become of Rover?"

Miss Horton tried to whistle, but whistling was not an accomplishment of hers even on the calmest days. Now, when the gusty outriders of the coming gale were galloping by, a single blade of grass could have made a more serviceable noise. She called feebly once or twice, but her voice was tossed upon the wind like the faint chirrup of a rock-pipit.

"He must have gone home," she said, and in her anxiety over the dog's whereabouts she gave up pestering Mark to let her escort him to the Vicarage and, mounting her bicycle, set out up Pendhu hill in an oscillating spiral of motion.

Mark's supper of rice and lentils, which was the first food he had tasted all day, was more than sufficient to restore his normal vision of commonplace objects and to banish the tendency of his nerves to perceive beyond their accidents an apparently significant but actually caricatured substance. At the same time he refused to admit that his behaviour toward the golfing schoolmasters had been light-headed. He was convinced that he should not have acted otherwise after a heavy meal of roast beef. The only thing he regretted about this Good Friday was his cowardice over the ceremony of creeping to the Cross. That alone prevented his sitting at peace by the fireside, hoping lazily that Aunt Penelope and Jennifer would not crash round the kitchen much longer, and turning over the pages of a book.

Suddenly the rattle of crockery ceased, and an unusual hubbub of excited conversation took its place. He was wondering what could have caused this discussion when Aunt Penelope burst into the room.

"You're wanted at once, Mr. Lidderdale. Miss Horton have sent Arthur Tangye and his sister Susie to say you're wanted at once."



Mark's fancy flew over a dozen possible reasons for the urgent message on his way to the kitchen, where he found Susie and Arthur Tangye, round-eyed and rather pale, waiting for him.

"However they come by theirselves along that great dark lonely road I'm sure I don't know," Aunt Penelope exclaimed. "And no lantern nor nothing. Only the wisht old moon to light 'em and skeer 'em worse nor ever. Spake up, my young handsones, and tell Passon how you come, while I find you a piece of saffron cake."

"Miss Horton sent us," Arthur began in that remote treble of his that was always a prelude to one of his difficult and conscientious narratives. "She come over to mother with the tears running down her cheeks," he went on, "and she said could Walter or Jimmie run to the Vicarage and fetch Mr. Lidderdale, and when mother said Walter and Jimmie weren't come back yet she begun to cry out aloud."

"I never saw an old maid cry like she in all the days of my life," Susie corroborated, and then realizing the size of her audience she hid beneath her arm a shy smile and a blush.

"But why did she want somebody to come here in such a hurry?" Mark asked.

But Arthur could not be short-circuited like this. For him his own nocturnal adventure and the necessity that compelled him to undertake it was not less important than Miss Horton's reason for calling upon his services.

"She begun to cry out aloud," he chanted, "and she said whatever would she do if no one couldn't run to the Vicarage and ask Mr. Lidderdale to come to once and speak to Mr. Stithian."

"Mr. Stithian?" Mark repeated in bewilderment. "How on earth does Mr. Stithian come into the story?"

"I only worked for Mr. Stithian but once," Toby Prawle put in from his corner by the fire, "and I mind it well, for I were tealing potatoes, and he come behind me and said, 'Is this the way you teal potatoes?' And with that the man give me a gurt kick and told me to clear off out of his field.

And I cleared off, and from that day to this I never spoke to the man."

"Toby," his aunt demanded, "an't I told you a score of times if you're left to come and sit in here you've got to keep your tongue still?"

However, Toby's interruption had enabled Arthur to get his tale into shape, and he went ahead now without digressions.

"Mr. Stithian caught Miss Horton's dog running his sheep, and he brought 'un down on a rope, and he told Miss Horton he were going to shoot 'un, and Mr. Scobell weren't come back from business, and Mrs. Scobell screamed when she saw the gun and locked herself upstairs with boy Frank and boy Eddie, and Miss Horton run across to our cottage, and Walter and Jimmie weren't come home, and I said I'd run to the Vicarage if someone would come with me, and Miss Horton kissed me, which made I mad, but I come just the same, because maid Susie said she weren't afeared of the Devil getting a-hold of her because it were Good Friday and the old Devil couldn't do nothing on Good Friday."

"And she kissed me too," Susie put in. "But I didn't mind so much as boy Arthur."

Lily and Dick Prawle stared at two children who were capable of such adventures. The thought of coming all the way along that valley unprotected by several grown-ups filled them with silent amazement.

"I'll put on my boots and be ready in a moment," Mark said. He did not know how he was going to deal with the angry farmer, but it was clearly his duty to go, and he was glad of the opportunity to pay back Miss Horton some of her well-meant kindness without the possibility of any sentiment's creeping into the action.

"I'll give the both of them a piece of saffron cake," Aunt Penelope announced, thrusting her hairy jaw up to Mark's face. "Jennifer, cut the cake, will 'ee?"

Jennifer Prawle obeyed her aunt like a clockwork figure that has been given a poke to set it moving.

"All right, my young lovely," she assured Arthur. "Only wait a minute, and you shall have some big slice of cake."

Arthur and Susie were still munching when Mark, taking the disengaged hand of each of them, set out to cope with the situation created by Miss Horton's dog.

"Susie," Arthur said to his sister after a few minutes of silent progress, "do 'ee feel frightened now?"

"I never didn't feel frightened," Susie asserted stoutly. "'Twas you who was all the time saying you could see ghosteses behind the fuzz."

"Well, so there was ghosteses," Arthur insisted. "Only I weren't frightened of 'em."

"'Twas no such a thing, boy Arthur, and you *was* frightened, because you held on to my hand so tight as wax."

"No, I didn't then. I didn't do no such a thing, Mr. Lidderdale. And if I did, the maid held on just so tight to me."

"I expect that the truth of the matter is you were really both of you a little bit frightened," Mark said, and the two small hands he held gave his a squeeze of assent. "But it's nothing to be ashamed of. I've felt a little frightened once or twice myself."

"When we come to that stone . . ."

"Don't say the name, boy Arthur, because 'tis rude," Susie broke in.

"I weren't going to say the name. Look to yourself, you maid, and don't always be telling me. When we come to that great round stone by the steps across the stream we ran so fast as foxes."

"My! we did run fast," Susie agreed with a little gurgle of retrospective terror. "Some do say that the old stone belongs to follow 'ee and if you haven't been good all the year you can't run away from it. But 'tis only an old tale, I believe."

"No, I don't think that sounds at all probable," Mark agreed.

"Please?"

"I'm sure that the stone will never move an inch after anybody," Mark assured her.

"Badgers 'll follow 'ee," Arthur put in. "Miles an' miles an' miles, a badger will."

"Hark, listen how the wind do blow," Susie exclaimed in awe. "But we can't feel it here."

"We're sheltered by the slope of the valley," Mark said with an affectionate downward glance at the two small figures that trotted beside him, taking two steps for every one of his. There was no counter for pluck, he thought regretfully, and he decided to mark a couple of white ones with a V for valour when the money-boxes were brought up next Sunday afternoon.

"Here's the old stone," Arthur announced. "It don't look so big as it did look when we came up along."

"I dare 'ee to kick 'un as we do go past," Susie challenged.

Forthwith Arthur spurned the monster with his boot, and his sister was reduced to a silence that lasted until the trees of Roscorla farm rose up before them in the moonlight.

"Mr. Lidderdale," Arthur said, "if I was to tell 'ee something, will you promise not to tell who 'twas told 'ee?"

Mark gave his word.

"Mr. Jago of Roscorla said that he'd a mind to fling a pail of dung over 'ee whenever he did look up and see you go past the town-place."

"Why, what have I done to offend Mr. Jago?" Mark inquired in some surprise, for he had been pondering the hostility of nature, and Arthur's information now brought him suddenly face to face with the hostility of man, about which there was much less room for speculation.

"He belongs to hate you," Arthur avowed. "And whenever he do see any of us children who belong to go church he mumbles to himself and do glare at we. But don't tell anyone I told 'ee, because he might get ugly and turn us out of our house."

This contingency had not struck Mark before, and he began to wonder if he should be able to endure the whole Tangye family in the Vicarage, for if they were turned out of their cottage on account of the church it would fall on him to see that they did not suffer by it. And what would Aunt Penelope say to that? However, perhaps that black-browed fanatic Jago would confine his malice to him-



self. Meanwhile, Mr. Stithian, a fanatic of another complexion, was the problem of the moment.

As soon as Mark and the two children emerged from the shadow of Roscorla into the wind and moonshine of Nancepean, Miss Horton came hurrying up the road to meet them, her aspect distraught by grief and anxiety, her hair dishevelled.

"Oh, Vicar, how kind of you to come! I do hope the walk won't be too much for you. I should never have sent for you if I had dared to come myself, but I was afraid to leave Rover with Mr. Stithian. He's sitting in my room now with his gun across his knee. And poor Rover is tied to the leg of the table. You know he's never done such a thing in his life. I can't believe it. It must be a plot to drive me away from Nancepean. I was painting once on Mr. Stithian's land, and he asked me if I knew that I was trespassing, and I said quite in joke that the sky was free to all. And ever since then he has disliked me. And now he says that Rover has worried twenty-nine of his lambs and seven of his ewes, and that either I must write him a cheque for £120 or he's going to shoot Rover before he goes to bed to-night. Oh, what shall I do? I can't write a cheque for £120, because the money I was expecting from the sale of some pictures hasn't come in yet. I feel half distracted. If my beloved Rover is shot, I shall go straight off and throw myself over the cliff."

During this speech, which was delivered to the accompaniment of gestures and punctuated with sobs, the two children stood regarding her with a concentrated and absolutely motionless interest of the kind they would have accorded to a pony that was kicking over the traces and liable at any moment to put its hooves through the splash-board of a trap.

Poor Miss Horton, however, was too much upset to mind what anybody thought about her.

"Thank you very much, Arthur and you, Sophie, or is it Susie? Oh yes, I see it's Susie. Wait a minute—no, I must give you a little present to-morrow morning. You see, Vicar, Mr. Scobell isn't back yet and that's been worrying

poor Mrs. Scobell all the evening, and of course when Mr. Stithian suddenly appeared in the doorway with his gun she thought it was a murderer and ran upstairs and locked herself in her bedroom with the two boys. I thought of going to fetch William John Evans, but when Mrs. Tangye kindly let two of her children go for you I thought it would be better. What is to be done? Oh, my poor old dog, my poor old dog! What should I do if I lost him?"

Probably Arthur and Susie still had hopes of seeing some tremendous drama with a gun take place, for while Mark followed Miss Horton up the zigzag path of the front garden, they remained by the gate in the same attitude of utter absorption.

Mr. Fred Stithian of Pentine was a large, florid man, with a trim red beard and a pair of very small blue eyes that twinkled sometimes at the humour of other people's discomfort or pain, but generally only with greed or lust. A side of an ox would not have looked more out of place in the flimsy front room of Tintagel than he did sitting on a spindleshanked painted chair with his double-barrelled gun across his fat thighs. He did not get up when Miss Horton and Mark came in, contenting himself with a nod that went beyond curtness and touched insolence.

"Well, Miss Horton, have you settled what you're going to do? I mustn't bide all night or my missus will be wondering where I'm to."

"If Miss Horton's dog has worried any of your sheep, Stithian," Mark said, "the proper course for you is to sue her for damages, not come down here and bully a woman."

Mark's intonation made the farmer sit up so abruptly and heavily that his chair creaked in every joint and seemed likely to break at any moment beneath the weight.

"And where do you come into this little matter, Parson? You're not in the pulpit now. Keep your preaching for them as it suits. It don't suit me."

"If you can't speak civilly, you'd better get out of here," Mark told him. "You'll shoot nobody's dog to-night."

The farmer jumped up and crashed the butt of his gun on the floor, which set Rover off barking.

"If that bloody dog don't keep his mouth shut, I'll brain him where he lays," the farmer swore.

"You'll brain nobody in this room to-night, Stithian," said Mark coldly. "Miss Horton, will you go next door and ask Mr. Dale with my compliments to come in? I should like him to see the way one of his local preachers behaves."

"That's enough of it from you, Parson Lidderdale," the farmer said savagely. "I'll take no sauciness from any man, least of all from you."

"Do you really want me to fetch Mr. Dale?" Miss Horton asked.

"Yes, please."

The two men did not speak until she came back with the minister, who evidently did not at all want to be dragged into the business. However, he had to listen to both stories, at the end of which he told the farmer that he was liable to put himself in the wrong by his high-handed action.

"I sympathize with you, Mr. Stithian, but I cannot help feeling that Mr. Lidderdale is right and that your proper course is to sue Miss Horton for the damage her dog has done."

"I'd liefer shoot the dog," the farmer declared.

"No, no," cried its mistress. "You mustn't be so cruel! You can't be so cruel!"

"There's no question of shooting the dog," Mark said impatiently. "Why don't you tell Mr. Stithian not to make such a fool of himself, Cass? If the dog has really worried one hundred and twenty pounds' worth of sheep, which I doubt, Mr. Stithian would not be content with shooting the dog, for that would put his case out of court right away. At the same time, I dare say that the dog may have chased his sheep, and if he did, Mr. Stithian is justified in asking Miss Horton to send the dog away."

Mark felt a twinge in thus taking advantage of the situation to get rid of both Miss Horton and her dog, but it was too good an occasion to be missed. With a bad

grace the farmer admitted that perhaps when daylight came it would be found that the actual damage done by the dog would be less than he had supposed. Therefore, if Miss Horton would agree to keep the dog under control until she sent it away, and would promise to pay for any ewes or lambs it had actually worried, he would forgo his right to shoot it out of hand.

"But mind you," he declared to Mark, "I don't make this offer because you saw fit to interfere in what don't concern you, and I'll say right out now in front of Mr. Dale that if you try and interfere with us down here, there's some of us will start in to interfere with you."

When a few minutes later Mark set out back to the Vicarage, Miss Horton ran after him to ask what time he would be hearing confessions on Holy Saturday.

"I'm not hearing any confessions," he said quickly. "You'd better walk up to Chypie. Mr. Kennedy will be hearing confessions between five and six."

What a merciful thing, Mark thought, that Rover should have behaved like this. No need now to import a Great Dane. He wondered what skies would next attract Miss Horton's brush. Had he not read somewhere of sunsets in the Painted Desert of Arizona? Or Paraguay? But Paraguay was open to objections from Miss Horton's point of view.

Unfortunately for Mark's plans Miss Horton found a good home for Rover; but she herself decided to stay in Nancepean without him.



## CHAPTER XI

### THE EASTER VESTRY

MARK had been pondering for some time whom he should nominate as Vicar's warden, and he finally decided on Albert Prawle. He fancied that this would be the very gesture of contempt that was wanted to show his opponents how little he heeded them. Moreover, it would be a lesson in democracy to some of the farmers who supposed that they alone counted in the civil and religious life of the community. The lack of landed gentry in the neighbourhood had given them an undue sense of their importance. Albert Prawle was a simple labourer, with nothing to distinguish him from the other labourers round about except perhaps that he was rather more stupid; but during the last two or three months he had been coming to church very regularly, and this could not be attributed to base motives, because when Mark had first engaged his aunt and wife to look after his house Albert had never come near the church, which clearly showed that policy played no part in his recent attendance. Nor could anybody accuse Albert of cherishing ambitions above his station. That meek pink-faced little man with straw-coloured moustache and watery pale blue eyes had never cherished an ambition in his life; while of whatever else his enemies in the parish accused him they could not say that in appointing Albert to be his churchwarden Mark was shirking his own share in the fight.

The only person in whom Mark confided his intention was William John Evans, who promptly said that if Albert Prawle was to be one of the churchwardens nothing should induce him to be the other.

"Why on earth not?" Mark asked irritably.

"Because 'tis plum foolishness to make a man like Albert

Prawle churchwarden," replied William John, red with indignation. "'Tis making a mock of religion. Why, everybody will laugh at him, and I won't be laughed at alongside of him. I've done my best for 'ee, Mr. Lidderdale, though you've gone against my advice from start to finish, but this is too much. There's not a soul to Nancepean who won't laugh at the notion of Albert Prawle being churchwarden. You might so well make a bullock churchwarden."

"Our Lord didn't choose His disciples from the leading farmers in the neighbourhood," Mark pointed out.

"What He done isn't here nor there. If He'd lived to Nancepean, He might 'a done different; and from what I can make out of it, He might 'a done a bit better where He was. None of they disciples was much good to Him. Why, only the other day you was carrying on in the pulpit yourself about the way Peter and the rest of 'em mucked things up. I wouldn't say if He'd have chose His disciples a bit better as there mightn't have been no crucifixion. But leave that as may be, 'tis no less than a slap in the face to Our Father Which Art In Heaven to make a half-natural like Albert Prawle churchwarden, so as Albert, a penny man, can go lording it with the bag over the half-crowners. What the missus 'll say, I don't know."

Mark hoped that Mrs. Evans would change her husband's point of view; but she was actually more indignant than he, and not even the fact that Miss Lambourne would be cheated of having her brother Job made vicar's warden, to which she had confidently looked forward, mitigated Mrs. Evans's anger. In fact, she went so far as to threaten that Donald should not be allowed to come any longer to Mark's Sunday-school.

"'Twill be a pretty church wi' old Penelope and Jennifer Prawle setting themselves up as the ladies of Nancepean. We shall see 'em coming driving down of a Sunday morning next, I suppose, the whole hungry crowd of 'em. Well, I don't often belong to think William John do have much sense; but he did have a little this time when he said he wouldn't serve as churchwarden another minute. Have you handed over the keys and accounts yet, William John? Mr.

Albert Prawle will be wanting to see that all's in order."

Mark's resolution was only strengthened by what he thought was this display of petty jealousy, and after supper that night he sent for Albert and told him of the office to which he intended to call him.

Albert looked puzzled and rather frightened at the news.

"I don't know what Mr. Jago will do," Albert said doubtfully. "He weren't best pleased when we belonged going church, but with that bay mare of his he was afeard to get another carter. But I reckon he'd as soon sell the mare as see me churchwarden. 'Twouldn't seem hardly fitty to be ordering about a churchwarden, though he do be a local preacher."

"Mr. Jago isn't the only farmer round here," Mark said. "There are plenty of others who would be glad of your services."

"It'll mean a black coat," Albert continued. "And that's a thing I've never been able to put my hands on. I heard tell of one for sale to Rosemarket, but when I got there and see it 'twas more of a green than a black and the sleeveses was too long and 'twere too big altogether. The man who wore it was a wrastler, and a powerful big upstanding kind of a man. Aunt Penelope said it make me look like a flea in a blanket. Aw, too big it were altogether."

"You can get along without a black coat for the present, Albert."

But Albert shook his head.

"No man living ever heard tell of a churchwarden wi'out a black coat."

"You can wear a cassock and a surplice," Mark told him, "and sit in the choir."

Aunt Penelope, who had been routing about on the outskirts of the conversation, broke in at this point:

"Never listen to him, Mr. Lidderdale. Never heed him. Albert, if Mr. Lidderdale do make 'ee a chichwadden, a chichwadden you'll be, my son, or your Aunt Penelope 'll chichwadden 'ee out of her house. If Mr. Lidderdale said I was to be chichwadden, a chichwadden I'd be and see Jago and the rest of them to the old Devil where they belong. A

fine thing when you belong saying what you will be and what you won't be, Albert. You do know well you've never belonged to say what you'll be since you was born. You'll stay where you're put, my son, and you've been put chich-wadden, so sit still and hold your tongue. Your father was always a poor mean-spirited emmet of a man, and you're just such another, I believe."

"Now, Penelope, that's quite enough of your chatter," Mark interrupted.

The Easter Vestry was held in the Parish Hall, which was packed in the expectation of seeing Major Drumgold put the new Vicar in his place once and for all. The resignation of William John Evans had greatly encouraged Mark's opponents, for not only was he the only supporter of any substance, but his withdrawal made it possible to elect Major Drumgold as people's warden without any of that open unpleasantness, the elimination of which plays such an important part in the externals of Cornish intercourse. As soon as the Major was elected, Mark nominated Albert Prawle as vicar's warden. The formal announcement, although a rumour of his intention had run round the countryside, stupefied the meeting into absolute silence for a minute or two. When Mark looked at Albert to see how he was bearing the greatness thrust upon him, he was astonished to find that the little man had suddenly acquired dignity. There he sat frowning at the hostile parishioners and somehow expressing in his attitude that whatever his Vicar said or did the Vicar's warden was ready to say or do likewise, let the consequences to himself be what they might. It was as if the indomitable soul of Aunt Penelope had forsaken that tough body and entered the softer abode of her great-nephew. He had always been known to have a firm hand and a cool head with a bad-tempered horse, and it began to look as if he would be able to bring those qualities to bear on bad-tempered humanity. Mark could have clapped his hands with delight.

Major Drumgold now rose to prefer his indictment.

"Gentlemen, I do not often have the pleasure of finding myself on the same platform, so to speak, as yourselves,



but political differences are buried like the proverbial hatchet when our deepest religious feelings have been stirred as they—er—have been stirred recently by—er—the—er—behaviour of the Reverend Mark Lidderdale, our new Vicar. I believe that I am voicing the general opinion of the many friends I find round me if I say that we are pained—er—pained and horrified and—er—wounded by the high-handed manner in which Mr. Lidderdale has ridden roughshod over our deepest religious feelings. I do not believe that I should be putting it too strongly if I said that he had trampled them underfoot—trampled them underfoot—trampled them underfoot—er foot!” The Major’s repetition of the phrase was not so much due to any nice appreciation of its rhetorical effect as to not being able for the moment to find the heads of his indictment which had been noted in pencil on an envelope. “Trampled underfoot—oh yes, first of all, I wish to say that I find my task a particularly difficult one, because personally I have nothing whatever against Mr. Lidderdale, and I hope that he will take whatever I have to say about his practices in a purely—in an absolutely—er—um . . .”

“Pickwickian sense,” Mark suggested.

The Major blinked.

“In an absolutely unpersonal, I should say impersonal way. First of all, I believe that I am voicing the opinions of the many friends I see round me to-day, when I insist that we do not like extreme services. We are simple people. We have been brought up for better or for worse to believe that the practices which Mr. Lidderdale is trying to ram down our throats were done away with once and for all at the Reformation. I do not accuse Mr. Lidderdale of being in league with the Pope. I say I do not accuse him of this. Nor do I believe that in holding these elaborate services he is actuated by any except sincere if mistaken motives. No! Mr. Lidderdale is no sheep in wolf’s clothing. And I am only sorry that some of his practices might lead anybody to suppose that he was. Gentlemen, we do not ask for much. We only ask that Mr. Lidderdale should give us the service we have been accustomed to since our mother’s knee. We do not want vestments. We do not

want incense. We do not want crucifixes and processions and bowings and scrapings and images and all this talk about the Virgin Mary. We do not want confession and absolution, when in the privacy of our own rooms we can speak to our Maker when and how we like. We want the dear old simple service of the Prayer Book. We want the Bible. We want Mattins reverently sung at eleven o'clock. We do not want the Mass. I would ask Mr. Lidderdale to look back to his own young days when his grandfather, old Parson Trehawke, was Vicar of Nancepean. Can he honestly tell us that he substituted the Mass for Morning Prayer? Did he deck himself out in all manner of gorgeous garments? No!

"But I have other and graver charges to bring against Mr. Lidderdale. How comes it that without what is called a facility from the Bishop of this diocese he has taken upon himself to remove the beautiful and simple wooden altar to the side of the church in order to erect in its place what I do not hesitate to call an abominable block of hideous stone? Gentlemen, that new altar has got to be replaced. I ask you as parishioners of—er—this parish to record by a show of hands your solemn protest against this high-handed action of Mr. Lidderdale in meddling with the fabric of the parish church, after which I shall invite you to sign your names to a protest which I shall forward to the Bishop of Bodmin for his attention.

"Thirdly, I wish to call Mr. Lidderdale's attention to the—er—incalculable harm he is doing to Nancepean by driving away visitors from the church. It has been my privilege to be one of the prime movers in forming our Golf Club, which nobody here will deny has brought a great deal of money into the neighbourhood. Those visitors are not parishioners, but they have certain claims upon us, and they ask to be allowed to worship in the way they are accustomed. They consider that for all the religious advantages they can get from coming to Nancepean they might as well be abroad. Many of them would prefer an honest Roman Catholic service which they would not expect to attend. I do not wish to revive an incident which I am

sure Mr. Lidderdale was the first to regret, but it is my painful duty to say that if members are going to be interfered with in the middle of their golf the consequences for Mr. Lidderdale are likely to be very grave indeed."

Major Drumgold then took the vote of protest and sat down, on which Mark rose.

"I confess that I might perhaps have been a little more deeply impressed by Major Drumgold's eloquent speech," he said, "if on looking round the hall at his listeners I could detect any of them who were regular communicants. I see Mr. Dale of Tallack, who built the chapel. I see Mr. Stithian of Pentine, and Mr. Jago of Roscorla, who are both local preachers and pillars of that chapel. I see Mr. Martin of Nankervis, who is another regular attendant at that chapel, and various others who would be perfectly justified in protesting if their minister offended their congregational feelings. I am not going to call them religious feelings, because I do not believe that people whose religious feelings have been—was it trampled upon?—content themselves with attending meetings. They either suffer in silence or they do something violent."

"Mind we don't do something violent," shouted Fred Stithian, who was still smarting from Mark's interference with him on Good Friday.

"What I want you all to understand," Mark went on, "is that I do not regard myself as the servant of my congregation, but as the servant of God. That being so, no protests by my congregation will have the slightest effect on me. I am sorry to have to take up this attitude, but it would not be fair to let you waste your time bothering the Bishop in the expectation that you will compel me to surrender. I shall not. It is humbug for most of you to come here to-day and talk about being deprived of anything. I am not going to make my church a coloured supplement of the chapel."

"And what about turning me away from the harmonium which I've belonged to play for six years?" Tom Pascoe shouted from the back of the hall.

"And was paid five pounds a year to do it," Albert Prawle

shouted back. "And all the time blayguarding those as paid 'ee."

The sequel to this meeting was a letter from the Bishop asking Mark to come and see him.

It was a blue and white April day when Mark made the journey to Bodmin. The platform of the station was crowded with jolly people in tweeds who had arrived for the annual daffodil show. The way they greeted one another and the consciousness they all displayed of interest and enjoyment made Mark feel lonely, and he had a momentary pang of envy because he was not shaking hands with old friends from the other end of the Duchy, or going to find out if So-and-so's new white trumpets were as wonderful as last year. He felt like a barbarian when he passed through these talkative jolly groups and walked on alone to Lis Escop. He found the Bishop much more frail than when he had visited him in the autumn, and he greatly hoped that too much would not be demanded of him, for he knew that he should find it hard to withstand that courteous and scholarly and holy man.

"I'm really sorry to bring you on such a long journey," the Bishop said, "but these discussions are difficult to carry on by correspondence. I chose to-day in the hope that you might be glad to avail yourself of the opportunity to see the daffodil show. And now tell me about your troubles at Nancepean."

Mark gave him as brief and as fair an account as he could of the parish, the troubles and difficulties of which when they were related in this dignified and tranquil room appeared petty enough.

The Bishop clasped his hands and made a steeple of his two forefingers, over which he looked gravely at Mark.

"We will put on one side for a moment the question of the advisableness of certain ceremonies in the present condition of your parish, ceremonies and customs that I should not feel justified in forbidding, and we will arrive at what I should consider definitely opposed to the spirit as well as to the letter of the Prayer Book. Major Drumgold, I think that is his name, says you are in the habit of saying



portions of the Communion service in Latin. Is that so?"

"Only the private devotions of the priest," Mark replied.

"Yes, I have heard that quibble before, Mr. Lidderdale, and I may say that I dislike it intensely. I assume that you refer either to the original *Secreta*, the prayer said in a low voice at the end of the Offertory in the Roman Liturgy, or more loosely to the silent recitation of the Canon. In other words, you are not quite sure in your own mind if the English Liturgy is complete. Well, even were that so, which of course would be an absurd postulate, there would still be no justification for introducing supplementary prayers in Latin."

"If your lordship insists, I am willing to give up the use of Latin," said Mark, who could not pretend even to himself that there really was the least justification, logical or spiritual or historical, for introducing Latin into the English Liturgy.

"Thank you, Mr. Lidderdale. I appreciate your readiness to accept my ruling. Now, with regard to non-communicating attendance at the Holy Eucharist. Personally I am probably as anxious as yourself that people should consider the Holy Eucharist as the great service round which the whole of our Christian worship revolves; but in view of the rubrical directions in the Prayer Book I do not think that until those directions have been amended we are justified in saying the Holy Eucharist without at least three communicants. The Prayer Book is quite plain on that point, and both you and I have vowed to obey it. Surely it is possible, Mr. Lidderdale, for you to provide this minimum of communicants?"

"I am deeply grieved, my lord, but on that point I cannot see my way to obey your ruling," Mark said. "I feel too strongly on that point to give way. If my services were going to be nothing more than Morning and Evening Prayer, I should not feel justified in remaining at Nancepean."

"Nevertheless, Mr. Lidderdale, I fear that I must insist on your canonical obedience."

"Then we are at a deadlock already," Mark replied, "for I cannot obey you on this point. I am prepared to give

up much, but not that, and if your lordship will forgive my frankness, I do not understand how you can expect me to surrender on this point. I thought I had made it clear that worshippers in my church are very scarce. A condition that might be accepted in a large parish is impossible in Nancepean. Moreover, I venture to think that, if your lordship had not been petitioned on other grounds, you would not have taken up this position about non-communicating attendance."

"That is quite possible," the Bishop agreed. "But you have only yourself to blame for that. This new altar, for instance, which you have put up without reference to me and without any attempt to obtain a faculty, is so flagrantly illegal that without any question if your parishoners take the matter into the consistory court you will be ordered to remove it, and nothing I could say or do would have the least effect. I am bound to add that I think you have done the cause you have at heart a grave disservice by your conduct. And I must repeat that by compelling me to take notice of things, to which with a little tact on your part I might have managed to remain blind, you have only yourself to blame."

"I am sorry to be so intransigent," Mark replied, "but I believe your lordship will think better of me for refusing plainly to give up what I believe to be right than if I were to promise renunciation and not perform that promise."

The Bishop passed one hand wearily over his forehead.

"I shall have to consider my course of action."

Then he fell into a reverie, his hands clasped again, his forefinger raised steeplewise, above which his holy face seemed like a sky the calm radiance of which was clouded for the moment by grief.

"To consider my course of action," he repeated to himself in half a whisper. Then, looking steadily at Mark, he resumed: "Are you convinced that there is no spiritual selfishness in the way you have begun your work at Nancepean? I cannot help feeling that Almighty God loves best the humble and that if you desire Him to bless your work you will pray first for humility. I cannot believe that He requires from His priests the assertion of Himself at the expense of

the weak and uninstructed. I should rather believe that, if you surrendered something for His sake that you for the moment thought vital, your reward would be boundless in the grace that He would pour down upon those souls at present untouched and in a way—please don't misunderstand me—in a way now being driven away from His presence."

"But, my lord," Mark exclaimed in astonishment, "at what stage is the tail to cease wagging the dog?"

"Better the tail should wag the dog than that for the sake of a form you should clip the tail short. But I do not ask you to give me canonical obedience, Mr. Lidderdale, unless you can give it to me for the love of God. I do not ask you to surrender anything, even saying the *Secreta* in Latin, unless you can do it for the love of God. You alluded just now to your Sunday-school, and I felt that your efforts in that direction were being blessed, because you loved these children through God and through them loved God. Have you not already made many concessions to help them? Would you be as severe with them liturgically as with their parents? Would you not be more patient and more charitable with them? Yet in the sight of God we are all little children."

"I will do what your lordship requires," Mark said abruptly.

"Not what my lordship requires and not what I require, Mr. Lidderdale, but what God requires. I do not want to feel in my prayers for you that I persuaded you against your better judgment because I knew how to handle you courteously and tactfully or even because you were sorry for an old man who would soon, very soon be called upon to answer to the Lord God for all his misdirections, his blunders and his follies, his sins, his insufficiencies, and his talents. I want to feel that you will do what I ask because you have been granted the wisdom that is from above, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy, for, as St. James goes on to say, the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace. And now about this altar, which I have no doubt is a great

improvement, we must hope that Major Drumgold and his friends will be appeased by your concessions and that they will take no further steps in the matter. But don't do things like that again without the necessary faculty. And now do let me advise you to visit the daffodil show. I wish much that I could go with you."



## CHAPTER XII

### THE ECHOING GREEN

MARK felt absolutely bewildered by his surrender when he got back to Nancepean and began to realize to how much or, perhaps it would be truer to say, to how little he had committed himself. In the first place he had a hard struggle with his pride, for all his opponents in the parish took to themselves the credit for showing how a turbulent priest should be handled, and Mark could not help being aware of the atmosphere of self-satisfaction over his discomfiture. He suffered most from his defeat by Major Drumgold, who until then had been thoroughly despised by the natives. Nor did the minister forget to rub it in.

"Why, Lidderdale, I never suspected that Major Drumgold had it in him. I hear he fairly gave it to the Bishop. I shall be having him up against me soon as a candidate for the presidency of the Fishing Company. By the way, you made a bad mistake in choosing Albert Prawle as churchwarden. I don't remember anything that has put the people's backs up more than that. I know you meant it for the best, but it was a bad mistake."

However, pride was a straightforward temptation that could be fought. Mark was much more worried by the fear that in surrendering so much he was betraying his Faith. The Bishop was old, and after the many battles of his career peace must seem to him of all states the most desirable. But was it? And was there really any more peace in Nancepean because he had been persuaded to give way? Not one of his opponents bore him any greater goodwill therefore, and his supporters could not but be shaken by the triumph of the other side. It might lead to their complete discouragement. It might end in his having nobody except the Prawles and Miss Horton.

Mark tried hard to recapture the good graces of Mrs. Evans, but she would not forgive him for making Albert Prawle churchwarden. She still came to church, but her presence cast a gloom of critical disapproval over everything, and any chance that Mark might have had of getting back on the old terms with her was spoilt by his acquiring the habit of going to tea twice a week with Miss Lambourne. Not that Miss Lambourne was any less annoyed over Albert Prawle than Mrs. Evans was, for she had confidently expected the vacant churchwardenship to be offered to her brother; but Miss Lambourne could not resist taking advantage of the situation to score off Mrs. Evans.

"Of course, Mr. Lidderdale," she said, "I do think that you did make a mistake over Albert Prawle, but that is no reason why Mrs. Evans should behave so strangely. But then Mrs. Evans is a very strange woman. I don't know to this day what I have ever done to offend her. But I must have done something, and I'm afraid that I shall never be forgiven. Perhaps my offence has been that I have seen a little more of the world than poor Mrs. Evans, though do not let me put you against her in any way, for I am sure that she is in every way a most worthy woman. She had an unhappy love affair in her youth—a very long time ago, of course. It created rather a scandal in her own village, for, of course, as you know, she's not a Nancepean woman. However, it's not fair to rake up these old stories, especially from such a very dim and distant past."

Mark was fully aware of the malice behind Miss Lambourne's judgment of her rival, but he was by now beginning to resent Mrs. Evans' injured attitude whenever he went to the Inn, and he had grown tired of trying to placate her by pretending that he did not notice any change in her demeanour toward himself. It was really a relief to sit in the comfortable parlour of Carwithen and be looked after by Miss Lambourne. He liked, too, the tall, silent brother who neither condemned nor praised any man. Only sometimes, when his sister overstepped the bounds of legitimately malicious gossip, did he wag his long beard at her in protest and mutter several times in rapid succession :

"The women! The women! The women! The women!"

Miss Lambourne possessed in addition to her qualities as a hostess the advantage of being a tower of defence against Miss Horton's indefatigable ambushes. Mrs. Evans had always been rather sorry for her, had called her "poor soul," and to give her pleasure as often as not had invited her to a meal at which the Vicar was expected. But Miss Lambourne never invited Miss Horton to Carwithen, and even her persistent deediness in all matters that concerned the Vicar was not proof against Miss Lambourne's frigidity.

"It's so droll," she said to Mark on one fortunate occasion when she did get him alone half-way up Pendhu hill. "Do you know I really believe that Miss Lambourne doesn't think that I'm quite respectable. Mrs. Evans tells me that she says quite dreadful things about me."

"You shouldn't gossip with Mrs. Evans," Mark commented severely. "I've never heard your name mentioned by Miss Lambourne. You'll be quarrelling with Mrs. Evans presently, and then you'll hear from Mrs. Fellow what dreadful things Mrs. Evans says about you."

"I wish you'd come and see Mrs. Evans sometimes. I know that she is exceedingly tiresome over Albert Prawle. But I'm sure that in her heart she is just as much devoted to you as she always was, and I honestly believe that if you would have a little patience with her and take a little trouble to conciliate her, she would soon forget all about Albert Prawle and the mortification of William John's ceasing to be churchwarden."

"I wish you wouldn't discuss me with Mrs. Evans, Miss Horton. I strongly object to being discussed over tea-tables," Mark said crossly.

"I can assure you, Vicar, that I have never once heard Mrs. Evans criticize you in any way. Her manner may be unpleasant toward you, but she is always perfectly loyal about you in front of other people."

Mark would probably soon have written to the Bishop and retracted his promise if he had not found a perfect consolation for all other disappointments in the children of the Sunday-school. During the winter and early spring

his intercourse with them had been limited outside church and school to occasional assemblies for playing games at the Hanover Inn. Now, with the fair weather and longer evenings, he was able to take them for walks and lose himself in the paradise of childhood, finding in their mirth and innocence the emotion which of all who have ever lived on this earth and written verse or prose or music or painted pictures only William Blake has been able to express:

*Such, such were the joys  
When we all, girls and boys,  
In our youth time were seen  
On the Echoing Green.*

In this companionship Mark forgot the complications of grown-up existence in Nancepean and devoted himself to the drama that was played daily in the village school. The figure of Miss Vivian (that pleasant mousy little woman with whom Mark as vicar of the parish had occasionally indulged in two or three minutes of polite conversation when he happened to meet her on the road) projected itself in a spectral immensity upon the minds of the children, and Mark, in beholding the reflected image of their own awe, perceived the substance of Miss Vivian more truly than in conversation with the mousy accidents of her, when, a mere profile, she stood leaning over the handle of her bicycle and chatting with him politely on the highway.

"Miss Vivian said this morning if maid Susie wouldn't attend she'd get the cane next time."

Thus Arthur very solemnly.

"Pooh!" Susie exclaimed with a toss of her head. "Who cares for Miss Vivian? If she went to fetch her old cane, I'd jomp out of the window and run away."

But Susie's heightened colour and a sparkle in her eyes of something between apprehension and resentment belied her words.

"How if the window was shut tight and you couldn't?" Donald asked.

"It wouldn't be shut tight," Susie declared.



"Ah, but how if it was, you maid?" Arthur pressed.

"If it was shut tight," said Maggie Wilton, entering the lists to champion her adored friend, "Susie would belong to break the old window."

"Miss Vivian would catch a-hold of her before she could," Sophie Tangye and Rosie Wilton retorted in prompt unanimity, each inspired by the chance of putting a younger sister in her place.

The other two little girls perceiving that the argument was likely to go against them withdrew hand in hand from the main body, the children in which were chattering as excitably round Mark as seagulls round a boat, and walked enlaced in the grassy ditch that ran beside the road, turning now and then to fling over their shoulders glances of conspiratorial disdain at the others.

Then followed a chanted tale by Arthur Tangye of how he and Charlie Woods had had the cane once, to which everybody (Mark included) listened with profound interest. Mark wondered why a child should never bore one, however long the tale it told. It was partly because it never sought to give verisimilitude by dragging in too many of the externals of time and place, and partly because on youth's empty parchment the writing is so much clearer than upon the palimpsest of age. And the tales told in the youth of the world did not bore the reader like most of those told to-day.

"Once Miss Vivian gave Charlie Woods and I the cane because we . . ."

Once upon a time. Not on any particular Wednesday or Thursday, not in any remembered season of the year, not because one sat here or wore that and another sat there and looked thus, but merely once upon a time where atmosphere was not required and action moved as swiftly and irrationally as in a dream. That conquest of time was one of Mark's sharpest pleasures in the companionship of these children.

"Do 'ee mind once, Mr. Lidderdale, when we played we was Indians and boy Eddie Scobell tumbled down and made his nose bleed and his mother said if he played Indians he must be more careful?"

This had happened only a week ago, but it was already a tale of the past touched by enchantment to sleep henceforth, perhaps for ever, in the recess of the fancy and there be overgrown with the briers and brambles of experience, or perhaps years hence to be roused by an old man and wake up as fresh as if indeed it were only a week ago.

The girls were as eager as the boys to play these denominational games of Indians, Pirates, Smugglers, Cavaliers, Early Christians, and a dozen more categories of political opinion or human activity, because in Mark's method the sides were picked out by the secret ballot of Oranges and Lemons. There was no counting out with Eena, Deena, Dinah, Do, Cataweena, Winah, Wo, nor any encouragement of factions by letting the same set of children always find themselves on the same side. It was useless for Arthur Tangye to be quite sure that Donald had chosen Oranges when Mark was liable to confront him with a choice between Raspberries and Pears, or for Rosie Wilton to overhear Sophie Tangye whisper Lemons when she herself would be asked if she were a Cherry or a Plum, and find in consequence that she was to be sacrificed at Aulis, while Sophie prophesied woe along the walls of Troy. Mark kept severely to the distinctions of sex in these games. Girls were women; boys were men. Sophie and Rosie accepted the disabilities of their lot with equanimity, and indeed with some complacency added, but Susie and Maggie longed for the martial opportunities of the boys, and both of them earned one or two brown counters for not playing up when the mythical or historical conditions that were being reproduced involved them sometimes in too dull a feminine inactivity. They had their days, of course, as when Susie as Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons, fought with her warrior maids against the Greeks and was allowed to slay all who crossed her path, until she was herself slain by a rather tremulous Achilles in the person of Dick Prawle.

"Though if it hadn't been a story I could have knocked him down so easy as a cup," she proclaimed on resuming her own identity.

Mark used to tell his stories at the beginning of a walk

until they reached a suitable spot for the drama to be played, which might be anywhere by stream or seashore or cliff's edge that the walk took them. He did not bother much about the historical perspective. He saw no reason to burden with dates those to whom a year was as long as a century and for whom these adventures in the past were nothing more than extensions of the present, coloured pictures as it were that illuminated the print of daily life. He sometimes wondered in what kind of a confusion of periwigs, armour, knee-breeches, and woad his heroes and heroines were clothed in the children's fancy, and he did not think that the few picture-books he was able to show them on wet days at the Vicarage did much to clear it up. But what did it matter, so long as they could take sides? And of that they soon showed themselves perfectly capable, so that not the most remote encounters of rival factions left them utterly listless about the rights and wrongs of a dispute. It was a very short time before Arthur was nearly in tears at finding himself doomed to portray a hated Yorkist or that Sophie was lamenting that her red hair would make so suitable a Queen Elizabeth.

The countryside for miles round Nancepean was unusually rich in romantic settings. Every kind of natural scene apart from high mountains was well represented. There was indeed no forest land of any extent, but there were enough small woods to impress the small children who dallied among their green dells and plucked the primroses in their sun-spangled shade. There were the shores of the Rose Pool from the waters of which King Arthur Tangye received Excalibur in the shape of a yard of lead piping from the substantial arm of Winnie Pellow, whose pinafore of white samite was sadly spotted by hiding among the bulrushes, those same bulrushes among which on another day Elsie Tangye, the daughter of Pharaoh, discovered the infant Moses, one of her own dolls, lying in a basket. And hard by those bulrushes there was that ruined water-mill, and the old cherry-trees in sparse bloom, and in a sunny corner half-choked by nettles a clump of blood-red tulips. Best of all there was the seashore with its caves and pools and rocks and level sands. Nobody found a silver dollar or a gold doubloon

or a drowned mariner, and nobody saw a mermaid or an octopus; but Arthur Tangye found a coconut husk on the very day he was Robinson Crusoe, and once they all came upon the carcass of a dead porpoise which, though it smelt very heavy, as Donald said, was not on that account less entrancing. Mark tried to recapture some of the bird-lore his grandfather had taught him, and with the help of one or two books he did manage to get back a good deal of it, and, what was more, infect the children with the right way of regarding birds. He would not allow any collecting of eggs because, as he told them, any egg that was worth collecting was much more worth hatching, and a common egg was not worth collecting. He instituted instead the collection of observations, for which purpose he kept a notebook in which he entered against the name of each child whatever unusual birds he had seen and whatever he could find out about their habits and their song. The renunciation of something they liked doing filled the children with as much anxiety as the grown-ups of the neighbourhood not to let others enjoy what they refused to allow themselves. The teetotalers of Nancepean were not more bitter against the drinkers than the Church Sunday-school was against the Chapel Sunday-school because the latter continued to rob the nests of birds.

"I saw Charlie Woods this morning," Arthur chanted, "and he was carrying a copperfinch's nest, and I said to 'un: 'Put back that copperfinch's nest, will 'ee,' and he said, 'I won't, so now then,' and I said to him again, 'Put it back will 'ee,' and he put out his tongue at me, and I ponched him into the hedge, and his eggsees was all scat up, and when I come into the schoolyard I said, 'Any boy that takes an egg out of a nest will have to fight me and Donald Evans,' and this morning I saw the blue bird that brings the Spring, and it flew before me up and down, up and down, for ever such a long time."

"Why do you call it blue?" Mark asked. "I call it grey," for the bird to which Arthur referred was the wheatear, though his grandfather had always claimed it was the fieldfare.



"We belong to call it the blue bird of Spring," all the children cried in chorus.

One day in a sunny fold of the cliff where the children were gathering flowers they came upon an adder basking in the sun.

"Kill 'un, kill 'un," they screamed.

"No, no," Mark interposed. "See how lovely it is." The snake flowed like a stream of jewels across the sunny path, and in a trice his jetty lozenges and glistening scales of silvery green vanished in the denser herbage.

"But adders belong to kill you," one of the children protested.

"Not if you leave them alone," Mark said.

He was regaled with hair-raising legends of being chased by adders, at which he scoffed so heartily that his listeners were obviously shaken.

"If you trod on an adder's tail, it might turn and bite you. It probably would. But when you come upon one like that, its only idea is to escape as quickly as possible. Think how beautiful it looked. Just like a wonderful live necklace of precious stones."

Two or three days after this Miss Horton informed Mark that it was generally believed in the village that the Vicar was teaching the children that there was no such person as the Devil.

"I thought I'd warn you," she explained mysteriously, "so that you were careful what you said to the children. They get hold of the wrong end, you know, and things get exaggerated."

She seemed anxious to say more, but Mark did not encourage the afflatus in Miss Horton, and whatever else she may have had to communicate was lost.

May month drew out to June, and June glided into July without Mark's winning any more children from the chapel school, but also without seeing any of those he had already won relapse. The stamp collections were beginning to grow in importance as they grew in size. All had the golden stamps of Easter and Whitsunday and Ascension Day, for which last festival Mark had insisted that all his children

should have a whole holiday from school and had carried his point. In the eyes of the children that was the most glorious triumph for the church over the chapel they could imagine, and it was not likely that for many a month they would forget the commemoration of their Saviour's flight from earth to Heaven. Mark tried his best to secure another whole holiday on Corpus Christi, but unfortunately his inability to show that feast in the calendar of the Prayer Book did not convince the parents that such an indulgence was necessary. However, most of the children acquired the scarlet stamp by hearing Mass in the morning before they went to school. Incidentally, Mark had obtained from the Bishop a formal permission to sing Mass on week-days even if he did not have the minimum of communicants. It would have astonished a more conventional teacher to see how closely Mark managed to weave the warp of fairy-tales and birds and flowers and butterflies and mythology and history and games of adventure into a brilliant and polychromatic web with the golden woof of the Catholic faith. Since few of his children were likely to go far away from Nancepean when they grew up, it was his object to make every bush and rock, every turn of the road and sudden sight of trees, every whisper of the wind, every murmur of the sea, every shadow of the clouds across the hills, and every note of birdsong in the valleys speak to them hereafter with memories of holy days and holy deeds. When sorrows should come upon them and they should be oppressed with the cares of the world, with labour and money-making and love, they might wish that they were children again. One of them might remember in the years to come that long ago as he went on a fine May morning to church he heard as now a yellow-hammer sing his greeting from that crooked hawthorn tree, and if he should by chance have drifted away from the worship of God the memory of that bird might draw him on to see if he could find consolation by returning to the faith of his childhood. It might be that none of these children would ever drift away. That depended upon himself and his capacity to keep his instruction abreast of his pupils' development. They must not think, when they were launched upon

the sea of adolescence and dreaming of the distant horizons to which they were bound, that on that farther shore there would be no need of religion. Like Columbus and his companions they must take the Gospel with them. It must not be left behind upon that elfin coast of childhood where toys and giants, angels, saints and fairies dwelt. There would come a time when that farther shore, so magical at first, would seem a monotonous swamp and its hinterland more barren than the sea, unless they carried with them a vision of a far more remote horizon, the flashing azure waves of which broke only in eternity.

When Arthur should be bent double like Granfa Hockin and when Susie should thump along on two sticks like old Miss Lassiter, and when these virgin faces now all red and white with wild flowers should be furrowed and cross-furrowed by the ruthless plough of experience, they might be, if they would, children still in the love of God. They might be overcome by a fugitive sadness and think, standing at twilight by their cottage doors, *Such, such were the joys when we all, girls and boys, in our youth time were seen on the Echoing Green.* Nevertheless, they would be filled to the brim with joy to remember that soon they should stand like children on the Echoing Green of Paradise. It was such an Echoing Green that Van Eyck painted, across which prophets, martyrs, confessors and virgins, all clad in robes of blue and red, came streaming to adore the Lamb of God for ever white, for ever young.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE SNAKE

THE weather became so hot in July that Mark suggested the children should celebrate it by all learning to swim. His proposal caused tremendous excitement, and for a week before the first bathing-party nothing was talked of except the various costumes with which the children were providing themselves. Mr. Scobell, as one would have expected, bought proper bathing-suits for Frank and Eddie, striped affairs such as little visitors wore and as grand in their way as the sailor suits they sported on Sundays. Indeed, had they been supplied with whistles on white cords in case they should be in danger of drowning and wanted to blow for help, it would not have been remarkable. Donald would probably have been given a new equipment, if a girl visitor of two years ago had not left behind her a red bathing-dress which his mother declared it would be a sin and a shame not to use. Donald might have objected to the frills on the shoulders if all the rest of the children had appeared in anything remotely like bathing-dresses; but compared with theirs his was so clearly what it was intended to be that he did not grumble at the minor fault of its having been originally intended for a girl. The coastguard's wife cut up an old willow-pattern curtain for Rosie and Maggie, but made the dresses so much too long and so much too baggy that the two little girls looked like a couple of ginger-jars when they stood hugging themselves at the water's edge. The equipment of the Tangye children taxed even their mother's optimism about making both ends meet. For two days she discussed with her neighbours the purchase of bathing-suits for all of them, even as far down the scale as Willie; and no doubt if she could have found a Rosemarket tradesman to give her credit



she would have indulged herself in a burst of sheerly luxurious shopping. In the end she bought a quantity of mauve, pale green and pink fondants, which gratified her sense of colour, but left her children clamorous and unclothed. At last, after threatening that if another word was said about the bathing she should forbid them so much as to wash feet, the local variant for paddling, during the rest of the summer, Mrs. Tangye applied herself seriously to the problem, and for a start took Walter's solitary pair of pyjamas, which had been washed ashore from a wreck eighteen months previously, and cut them down for Sophie. For Susie and Elsie a pair of her husband's underpants and a vest were cleverly cut about and stitched to provide two costumes, while for Arthur, having robbed the males of the family for the females, she took Sophie's only chemise and sent him into the water looking exactly like a small clown. Lily and Dick Prawle appeared in flannelette combinations that resembled rashers of streaky bacon, and Winnie Pellow in a truly astonishing confection of oilskin.

The first bathing expedition on a warm and misty Saturday morning in a sea of oxidized silver was not quite as successful as Mark had anticipated. These children who had spent all their lives on the brink of the Atlantic were horribly frightened of entering it when it came to the point. Each one urged the other to go in first; but nobody would advance beyond his knees. So far up as that their bodies were familiar with the sea; but the moment the scarcely heaving water rose an inch higher all the children leapt back as if they were being bitten by a dragon. In vain did Mark swim splashing to and fro, or stand up to his waist in the oily water and shout encouragement.

"What is the good of all those wonderful bathing-suits and bathing-dresses if you aren't going to do anything more than paddle? Come along, Donald, I'm ashamed of you. Arthur, for goodness' sake be a man and set an example."

Arthur may have been impelled to a piece of knock-about humour by the clown's costume he was wearing or he may have decided to set an example at another's expense; whichever it was, he at once gave Eddie Scobell a tremendous push

in the back and set him down with a splash on his face in the water. Susie almost at the same instant played a similar trick on Sophie. The next thing was the spectacle of two grotesque wet figures running back as fast as they could across the level sands, each bound for the cave in which it had undressed and screaming while it ran until the cliffs echoed and reechoed with the sound.

"Come back, come back, you little duffers," Mark shouted.

But Neptune himself could not have compelled them to heed him nor Queen Thetis in her nacreous chariot have lured them to turn their heads.

"You'll all get brown counters next week," Mark threatened. "Except Arthur and Susie. And they'll have red ones."

To earn the red counters of unkindness was a serious matter. Arthur and Susie looked at each other in dismay.

"If you'll knock me down," said Susie, "I'll push you down. Then we shall both belong to be in the water properly."

Arthur fell, like Cassius upon the sword of Pindarus, upon his sister. Both found it much less terrible than they had thought, and with a shriek of excitement pulled down Donald on top of them. Rosie and Maggie Wilton, taunted by Mark with not being true daughters of a sailor, shut their eyes and sank into a sitting posture. Elsie Tangye did the same, but unfortunately chose a jelly fish for a footstool and retreated yelling up the beach. Frank Scobell, who had been weeping ever since his brother fled, decided that he was wet enough and followed Elsie. Lily and Dick Prawle and Winnie Pellow copied their example, though Winnie did achieve a kind of a bath by falling into a mess of warm and sticky seaweed at the entrance of the girls' cave. Mark tried to give some lessons in swimming to the daring ones; but when they were held horizontally in the water they all wriggled and giggled so much that he had to abandon the attempt. On the way back to join the timid ones and dress, all the five daring ones earned purple counters for boasting of their bravery. They had nearly reached the caves when Susie exclaimed:

"My gosh, where's boy Willie to?"

The globular form of boy Willie, three years old and two feet six inches from pole to pole, was sighted nearly a quarter of a mile farther along the beach. Wrapped in a weather-beaten flag, a relic of the coronation of King George V, he had in accord with the interior life he led wandered away from the noisy bathers to pursue his unplumbed meditations. When his sisters overtook him and were about to shake him for his truancy, he produced from the folds of his flag two small crabs and a tiny dab with which he frowningly threatened them. Then with grave unhurried steps he followed them back to be dressed, though at the least sign of any interference he was ready with his weapons.

"I believe Willie 'll learn to swim before any of you," Mark said.

However, after this first bathing party, the children gradually lost their nervousness, and within a week they were enjoying the water with as much zest as the most enthusiastic visitor. Then one day Winnie Pellow did not come, and when Mark asked her mother why she had not joined the others she turned away and gave him one of her brusque and inconclusive replies. He supposed that she was offended with him about something, and by this time his heart was so much engaged with the health and prosperity of his school that, meeting Miss Horton soon afterward, he asked her what was the matter with Mrs. Pellow, preferring to indulge Miss Horton to that extent than by neglect or pride to allow a small rift to widen and perhaps destroy the lute which now played such entrancing harmonies.

"I've not heard anything," Miss Horton said, simmering with joy at being asked the question. "But if you like, I'll try and find out, Vicar. Very tactfully, of course. But I know you would rely on my being extremely careful. I shan't mention that I've seen you lately. I'll . . ."

"Oh, please, my dear Miss Horton, don't make a conspiracy of such a tiny matter. You'll do much more harm than good by making inquiries. I thought that in the course of the day's gossip you might have heard that she had a

grievance over something. But I don't at all want you to investigate."

Poor Miss Horton would gladly have endured deafness for the remainder of her life if she could but have gratified the Vicar by having heard something now.

"What makes you think . . ." she looked behind her furtively, and perceiving a figure cross the road about three hundred yards away, she went on in half a whisper, "what makes you think that Mrs. P. is offended with you?"

"My dear Miss Horton, if you haven't heard that she is offended with me, should I be likely to tell you why I thought she might be? Look at the lovely sky! You ought to be hard at work painting instead of wasting your time in talking to me."

Mark had not gone a few paces before Miss Horton turned back and came running after him.

"Vicar, Vicar, I forgot to ask if you'd want me to communicate at Mass to-morrow morning. It is St. Mary Magdalene's day."

"If you want to communicate, of course you can communicate, Miss Horton. But you know perfectly well it is only on Sundays that I have asked you to communicate, so that I may keep my promise to the Bishop."

"Do you want to have a sung Mass for St. James on Saturday morning, as the children won't be going to school?"

"Yes, of course, of course."

"I'm teaching them a new Sanctus."

"Splendid," said Mark, wishing he could borrow from St. James the club with which he was martyred so that he might threaten Miss Horton with a similar end. "Now do be careful, Miss Horton, or you'll lose this lovely sky. I'm sure it has changed in the last half an hour while you've kept me talking here."

"You really are a naughty man!"

She shook a roguish finger at him, and, though it was with evident reluctance, she at last allowed him to go on his way.

St. James's Day. Mark thought of the hot city pavements and of the children in Chelsea and Pimlico who raked the



foreshore of the Thames for stones to build their grottoes and for green slimy weeds to decorate them. The shrill insistence of their begging rang in his ears from brassy July days in London.

"Pleasse to rebeber the grotter ! A peddy for the grotter !"

He wondered if any of the tradition of the great mediæval pilgrimage to the shrine of St. James at Compostella lingered in Nancepean. None of the children had said anything about building a grotto, so probably it did not. How strange that in London of all places that ancient custom should have endured, but no doubt few pilgrims to that substitute for Jerusalem ever set out from Cornwall in the Middle Ages. Anyway, Mark decided, a splendid grotto for St. James should be the pastime for next Friday after school. He must set the children to scour the beach for scallop-shells, so that on Saturday after Mass they could wear them when he blessed the grotto. There was no reason why it should not be built just inside the churchyard.

So on Friday a grotto was erected with all the most beautiful stones that could be found. The Nancepean beaches were not famous for their shells; but nine pigs, as cowries were called locally, were picked up by dint of careful searching, enough to make a martyr's crown for the saint. While the boys worked at the stones, the girls gathered seaweed; and though the rosy plumes and green ribbons did not look so lovely as they did when waving in their own pools, still by spreading them carefully the effect was very good. Scallop-shells for the pilgrims were at a discount. Only two were found after a hard search, and one of these was broken. However, Mark decided that mussels could be used instead, and the children much enjoyed the ceremony of exorcizing them, which was done after Evensong when the grotto was finished.

The thrilling prospect of the visit to the grotto in solemn procession after Mass made all the children very punctual on that Saturday morning; and they sang the new Sanctus as triumphantly as if indeed they really were angels and archangels and all the company of Heaven, while Arthur, whose turn it was, rang the Sanctus bell as if indeed it were

an alarm against the fires of Hell. Opportunities to have a sung Mass early in the morning were scarce; it was seldom that a feast of sufficient solemnity fell upon a Saturday morning. No doubt the rarity of them enhanced their beauty. To Mark it was like listening in a garden to birds at dawn. Not that superficially there was much resemblance between the fidgiting of the Nancepean choir and the flutterings and warblings of blackbirds, nor between the faces of the children, lily-rosed though they were with youth and happiness, and those dawnstruck flowers in a border so still that it seemed but the reflected image of itself, a phantom perfumed with the breath of life. As the Mass went on, the plump and jovial sun rolled beaming southward and the shrill chant of the children ascended like the song of larks into the pearly sky of the morning.

*O Lamb of God That takest away the sins of the world,  
grant us Thy peace.*

Feeble and poor and uncertain though the singing was, Mark was carried away by the sound, or rather the sound flowed between him and the world of the senses and left his imagination so free that he was able to apprehend the eternal youth of God. In that moment, gazing upon the Host, he was granted to behold the Lamb with the eyes of a child.

*Little Lamb, who made thee?  
Dost thou know who made thee?  
Little Lamb, I'll tell thee,  
Little Lamb, I'll tell thee:*

*He is calléd by thy name,  
For He calls Himself a Lamb.  
He is meek, and He is mild;  
He became a little child.  
I a child, and thou a lamb,  
We are calléd by His name.*

*Little Lamb, God bless thee!  
Little Lamb, God bless thee!*

Mark was torn back from his rapture of contemplation by what seemed a laugh of diabolical mockery floating into the church from outside. Yet he knew from the restlessness of the children that it was real. Without that assurance he might have been tempted to suppose that it was a delusion, although not less diabolical because it was confined to himself.

As soon as Mass was over, the children formed up for the procession to the grotto; but when they came to it they found that somebody had kicked it over and made of it nothing but an untidy heap of stones smeared with seaweed.

"I know who it were done that," shouted Donald, rage flowing from his countenance in waves of crimson until it was like a mask of white paper. "'Twere Tom Pascoe done that, I'll be bound. If I could see 'un, I'd show him something he wouldn't soon forget."

"Aw, you'd show me something, would you?" And there was Tom Pascoe's snaky head upraised above the churchyard wall. "And what would you show me? How to kiss the Pope's toe?"

"No, I'd show 'ee how to aim with a stone!"

Stooping quickly, Donald picked up a jagged one and flung it with all his might at the sexton, who only dodged it by throwing himself face downward in a bed of nettles.

Mark was wondering if he ought to disengage himself from the heavy red cope he was wearing, in case Tom Pascoe should be so much infuriated as to attack Donald. But when Tom Pascoe was on his feet again, though his face was mottled with stings, which made him look more like a snake than ever, he contented himself with threats and abuse, and Mark was able to get the children back into the church without coming to blows.

Miss Horton was hard at work in the tower with a spirit lamp, boiling water to make the Vicar tea, so that he need not go home for his breakfast and would have no excuse for refusing to let her gratify her dearest ambition, which was to join the bathing-party.

"Oh, Vicar," she exclaimed, "do you know we've made the most ludicrous mistake? It isn't July 25th to-day. It's the 26th, and St. James's Day was yesterday."

"Well, that's your fault, Miss Horton, for interfering. If you hadn't fussed me the other day I shouldn't have taken the date for granted. You must have put me wrong for the whole week," he said indignantly.

Mark was upset by Tom Pascoe and in no mood to be kind to Miss Horton.

"Never mind about the calendar, Vivar," Miss Horton said when they were all picnicking over an extraordinary breakfast on the Castle cliff. "Let us enjoy our bathing-party."

Mark grasped her cunning plot.

"I'm not going to bathe this morning, Miss Horton. I've got a bone in my leg."

The children all protested loudly.

"Oh, Mr. Lidderdale, you've no such a thing," Susie Tangye exclaimed.

But Mark was sure that he had, and a very large one, too.

"Never mind, children," said Miss Horton, for once allowing her disappointment to get the better of her and make her look quite definitely cross. "Never mind. I'll bathe with you."

The children stared first at her and then at one another.

"But where's your bathing-dress to?" they asked in bewilderment.

"Never mind, you inquisitive little things. You'll see when I go into the water."

It was now Mark's turn to stare. Surely . . . no, the idea was too monstrous! But where *was* her bathing-dress? Yes, Miss Horton's bohemianism had gone to her head with the heat of the dog-days, and, monstrous though the idea was, she actually did appear to be about to bathe with nothing on. He drew her aside out of earshot of the children.

"Miss Horton, you're surely not serious?" he said.

"About what?"

"About bathing without a dress?"

"You silly man! Oh, really, now isn't that quite too rich for words! Do you think that I am quite mad?"

But owing to the children's account of Miss Horton's wear-



ing her bathing-dress under her ordinary clothes it was rumoured in the village either that she had bathed with nothing on or else that she had walked down to church in her bathing-dress, and, thus attired, played the harmonium. Within a day or two it was reported everywhere in the Rhos and generally believed that Miss Horton had undressed behind a bush in the churchyard, and that Tom Pascoe, seeing her walk stark naked out of the gate, had been so much horrified by her behaviour and the popish practices which had led up to it that he had forthwith taken his pickaxe and smashed up the Vicar of Nancepean's new altar.

The story was absurd enough to be laughed at, and, indeed, Mark did have a good laugh over it with Kennedy in the garden of Chypie Vicarage. Yet when he was trying to laugh over it to himself in his own Vicarage he could not do so. There seemed to lie behind it a sinister intention, so that presently what had been such a good joke came to signify a piece of poisonous obscenity.

Mark decided that he must make an effort to get one or two of his friends to come down and stay with him during August. He began to be afraid of the eccentric opinions that solitude was begetting in him. From thence to eccentric behaviour would be a short step, and at this rate before another year was out he should be like the rest of the clergy in the Rhos, all of whom, with the exception of Kennedy, were figures for the ridicule of the laity and for the patronizing compassion of their brethren nearer to the source of diocesan life. The story about Miss Horton and himself both bathing with nothing on (it had reached this by now) was obviously the crude invention of rustic gossip, but behind it—behind it—yes, behind it there was some motive, perverted, sickening, malevolent.

Unfortunately, none of Mark's friends could pay him a visit that August; and although he threw himself more keenly than ever into the entertainment and education of his children and was able to keep out of Miss Horton's way, he was all the time oppressed with a sense that there was some horrible thing impending. Winnie Pellow was never allowed to join the expeditions, although her mother still brought her

to church and let her come to Sunday-school. Moreover, Mrs. Wilton took to refusing Rosie and Maggie permission to join the walks and games, usually without giving any reason. Wilton's chest had become very bad, and having been given leave of absence he was now in a London hospital under the fancy that the breezes of his native Thames would restore him to health. The effect of his departure on Mrs. Wilton was disastrous. She had been so much elated by inquiries at the cottage after his health when he first went away that, when these grew less frequent, her self-importance was starved, with the result that she spent more than half her time gossiping in the village and always bringing round the conversation to the subject of her husband's illness. Meanwhile, her household went to pieces, and the erstwhile tidy little white-washed cottage, all shipshape and Bristol fashion, looked as sloppy as Mrs. Tangye's interior. In fact, it looked worse, because Mrs. Wilton had more furniture with which to make a sloppy effect. There were even rumours that she and Mrs. Tangye sometimes spent the afternoon discussing their domestic difficulties over a bottle of gin.

"They've neither of them bought a single drop at the Hanover," Mrs. Evans declared. "And if they wanted to I've forbid William John to leave the either of them have it."

Mark was much distressed that the home of a fine fellow like Wilton should go to pieces in this way and took the opportunity of the failure of Rosie and Maggie to attend some rendezvous to pay a visit of remonstrance to the grass-widow.

Mrs. Wilton was looking flushed when she opened the door, and a mistiness in her blue eyes made him fear that the story of the drinking was only too true. It was sad to see a young woman of thirty so loose-lipped and blowsy, especially one who but a short while ago had been as trim a little wife as any man might have the good fortune to find. When she led him into the sitting-room, he caught a glimpse through an open door of a bed still unmade and of dirty petticoats in a huddle on a chair. And it was already six o'clock of a hot summer's afternoon.

"Well, how's Wilton getting on?"

"I heard from him only this morning," said the wife, "and he seems the way he writes as if he was very middling. He says he spits a lot of blood all the time and never knows if he won't have another of those hemmeridges any time of the night or day. As I was saying to Mrs. Tangye only this morning, I was saying, 'Mrs. Tangye, you mark my words, he'll never come out of that sanitarium, not until he comes out feet foremost,' I said to her, 'and him a man not yet come to his thirty-seventh birthday.'" Mrs. Wilton mopped her moist blue eyes with the end of a dirty check apron.

"It does seem hard," she sighed.

Mark would have felt more sorry for her if the room had looked as it did when her husband was at home. The two pictures askew on either side of the overmantel gave it a kind of grimace and seemed to belie the genuineness of Mrs. Wilton's grief.

"And if he goes," she went on, "whatever 'll happen to his two little fatherless girls I'm sure I don't know. I'm sure sometimes I come all over like at the thought of it and hardly know what to do for the best. They say everything happens for the best, but it makes you wonder sometimes."

"You make a great mistake in anticipating the worst, Mrs. Wilton. I've no doubt whatever that Wilton will be back on duty soon as well as ever he was, and if I were you I should have the house ready for him. What happened to Rosie and Maggie to-day? This is the third time this week they haven't turned up with the others for bathing."

Mrs. Wilton looked embarrassed.

"I had to keep them back to help me with the housework," she explained without meeting Mark's eyes.

"Nonsense," he said sharply. "You could manage the house perfectly well when they were at school, and so long as Wilton was at home it was kept a very great deal neater than it is now. It's not fair to have them pottering around the house during their holidays in this fine weather. Where are they now?" he asked, looking round for a glimpse of the two little girls.

"I had to send them on a message up to Polgarth. The milk was forgot somehow to-day."

Mark frowned. He had an affection for Joe Dunstan himself, but he did not think that the kitchen of Polgarth was at all a good place for two little girls. Those three brawny sons and their huge mother were apt to be rather too free with their tongues.

"Well, I hope they'll turn up to-morrow afternoon," he said.

"Yes, I'll see if it can be managed," Mrs. Wilton replied; but by the tone of her voice Mark felt sure that she did not intend to let them come, and with a cold good-bye he left the coastguard's wife to herself.

At the Hanover Inn, where Mark called next, he found Mrs. Evans grim and sibylline. He had fancied recently that she was gradually forgiving him for making Albert Prawle churchwarden. It was disappointing to find her brows knitted and her eyes smouldering.

"I've just been talking to Mrs. Wilton," he volunteered, unable to keep out of his voice that note of apology with which, in spite of himself, he always approached Mrs. Evans in one of these moods. Her eyes took on that queer screwed-up expression as if she was aiming at some distant foe whom she intended to bring down with her tongue.

"There's few, I believe, that hasn't been talking to her this last month."

"I was asking her why her two little girls hadn't been down bathing with the rest the last two or three days."

"And did she tell 'ee?" asked Mrs. Evans, her eyes still fixed on that distant quarry.

"She didn't give a very satisfactory explanation. I didn't see the children myself. They were up at Polgarth."

"Surely!" Mrs. Evans exclaimed mockingly. "'Tis where they belong to be all the time these last weeks. A pretty place for two little maids! But there, some people don't mind what kind of language their *own* little maid do hear, lev alone for others."

Mark thought that if he waited without interrupting he might get a clue to the behaviour of Mrs. Wilton.



"Somebody was talking to Dolly Masterman this afternoon, and they said Mrs. Tangye's nose was looking a bit crooked."

Mark was completely mystified; but he did not dare ask the sibyl a direct question lest she should fall into a broody silence.

"Yes," Mrs. Evans continued, "they said that since somebody found a new friend Mrs. Tangye might stand all morning by her gate and her twin babies lay screaming indoors, but a certain person never so much as stopped to say a word, only give her a nod and pass on *up* the road."

Mark could not help himself:

"I don't know what you're talking about. Dear Mrs. Evans, do treat me as a friend again and tell me exactly what is the matter."

"Perhaps nothing is the matter, perhaps everything. Who was the first of the maids not to come bathing?"

"Winnie Pellow."

"There's your answer, then."

"I'm still puzzled. Do you mean that Mrs. Pellow persuaded Mrs. Wilton to keep her children at home?"

"At home!" Mrs. Evans scoffed. "More at home than they ought to be with Gramma Dunstan to Polgarth and those great, coarse, filthy-tongued Dunstan boys. But go your own ways, Mr. Lidderdale. I'm only a jealous, foolish woman. I warned 'ee back along, and you wouldn't hark to a word. Lev Lady Lambourne tell 'ee how to manage the church. Lev Albert Prawle and Aunt Penelope tell 'ee! Lev Annie Pellow tell 'ee! 'Twere best you should go your own ways."

When that night Mark thought over Mrs. Evans' words he decided that they were not just an outburst of spleen, but that she was hinting at something definite. In the end he came to the conclusion that his weekly bill at Mrs. Pellow's shop was not large enough to make it worth her while to keep in with him and that Drumgold must have been getting at her husband. Mark knew that he had been none too pleased to see him holding his own. It was just one of those bits of petty treachery he should have expected

from the Major. And Mrs. Pellow had not been able to resist persuading Mrs. Wilton to support her. The next thing would be that neither Winnie nor Rosie and Maggie would appear at Sunday-school. Evidently Mrs. Wilton had got friendly with Mrs. Pellow up at her mother's.

"However, I suppose they'll wait until the Church Treat is over and secede in time for the Band of Hope Tea," he said to himself as he went wearily up to bed.

Mark had arranged to celebrate the Feast of the Assumption by hiring a waggonette and after Mass driving the whole of his supporters to the other side of the Rhos for a picnic on Roscarrack sands.

Rather to his relief Miss Lambourne did not think that she could come, for she was disliked by all the other women, and her presence would have shed a gloom on the whole entertainment that not even Mrs. Tangye could have withstood, although Mrs. Tangye's idea of Heaven was driving in a crowded waggonette, eating a great many cakes, drinking a great deal of ginger-beer, and singing hymns all the way home. On this occasion her enjoyment was tempered by the responsibility of Lydia and Celia, particularly when Mark told her that the treat was for the children, and that he was not going to let poor Sophie spend her day sitting on the beach, nursing her little sisters and their bottles.

Mark had made attendance at nine o'clock Mass an indispensable condition of going, and this gave him the largest native congregation he had had since the Harvest Festival. Twenty-five was the exact figure, which included Lydia and Celia Tangye. In fact, the only absentees were Albert Prawle, who was busy with the harvest, and Toby, who was sleeping off the effects of the reward for killing a fox two days ago. Even Miss Lambourne was in the church, although she was not going on the expedition.

"Just to show off," Mark overheard Aunt Penelope say to Mrs. Tangye, "and make anybody believe she'd ever come to church on a Friday morning just to pray. I do dearly hate to see anyone show off like that."

Unfortunately the morning was grey, and by the time the waggonette had reached the most exposed part of the wild

heathery land that made up the greater part of the peninsula a light drizzle began to fall.

"'Tis damping a bit now," William John said, "but 'twill likely turn to fog by twelve o'clock."

The bushy Cornish heather was in full bloom, and there was nothing to break the immense monochrome of faded rose except a few leaden pools surrounded by drifts of be-draggled cotton-grass, and here and there a stunted pine. Yet on fine days the sun would incarnadine that great expanse of heather with the hue of life, with more than that, with the glow of hidden fires beneath; and once at sunset the stems of the pines had gleamed like copper and around golden pools the drifts of cotton-grass might have been plummy birds of paradise. It was sad that the children should see it shrouded thus in rain.

After four or five miles the waggonette reached Lanbad-dern woods, and for a time travelled along a wide road over-arched by trees and full-scented with bracken in its tall prime. Followed a steep descent down a rocky lane to the left, so steep that the driver asked that as many as possible should get out and walk. At the bottom of the lane was a small gabled house, the walls and even the roof of which were covered with an ivy-leaved geranium of that crude and vivid pink which to children seems the loveliest colour in the world. Just beyond this house the lane rounded the headland that marked the southern boundary of Roscarrack sands and came to an end in the sands themselves. There was no sign of another habitation, for Roscarrack Churchtown lay quite two miles away to the north and a mile or more inland. In spite of the drizzle the children ran laughing and screaming across the sands, which were as flat and hard as a great biscuit, while the grown-ups tried to find a suitable place for the picnic. The wind was rising in the west and beginning to blow in gusts across the towans. The drizzle became a drench of heavy rain. It was most discouraging. Mark suggested that somebody should go back and inquire at the geranium house if they could be given the shelter of a barn. William John went off at once, but soon came back with the

news that there was nobody at home and no sign of a barn anywhere.

"'Tis bolted fast, windows and doors," he announced. "And I don't believe anyone lives there, because the geranium has grewed all over the chimneys."

"Is it empty? If it is, we'll break in. I'll take the blame," Mark said.

"No, 'tisin't empty. 'Tis full of furniture, and it wouldn't do to break it. Roscarrack folk is funny. None funnier to all the Rose. We belong to call 'em Roscarrack hawks, because they do reckon a Roscarrack man 'll tear his own brother to pieces."

The children came running back over the sands with news of better birds than the men of Roscarrack.

"We saw some sea-swallows, Mr. Lidderdale," Arthur chanted. "And they were so pretty. They flew out to sea when we come near them, and then they flew back and walked about upon the sand, and when we come near again they flew out to sea again, and come back ever so far along the beach, and walked about on the sands again."

"And we saw some sea-parrots, Mr. Lidderdale," said Susie, who had shown a keener interest in nature than the other girls. "And they looked like funny lill old men. Only they had yaller feet."

"No, they weren't yaller. They was orange," said Donald.

"Isn't orange yaller?" Susie demanded.

"Yes, if your hair's so red as maid Sophie's," Donald retorted.

This fixed Susie, and she declined to argue longer.

It was now raining so hard that Mark suggested that as many as possible should sit under the waggonette while he took the children and climbed over the garden wall of the geranium house to get in the lee of the wind and rain on the other side of a belt of evergreens.

"Winnie, you'd best stay here with me," Mrs. Pellow said.

Mark did not pay much attention to this at the moment, because Mrs. Pellow always fussed a good deal over her daughter.

"Mother called to us to stay," Maggie Wilton confided,



putting a very wet hand confidently in Mark's. "But we pretended we couldn't hear her, because we wanted to come up along with you."

Mark smiled down at the little upturned face among the drenched roses of which two eyes sparkled with mischief like raindrops in the sun. Maggie was as full of vitality and mischief as Susie, but she was much less mercurial. It was a comfortable, cosy kind of mischievousness, an attitude of mind rather than the expression of a physical need.

Mark's capacity for telling stories had never been so much taxed as on this soaking afternoon. Even tucked back as far as possible under the evergreens, the weather found them out, and by the time a couple of hours had passed they were nearly wet through, because every now and then the wind shook down upon them showers of raindrops from the leaves, although they were able to shelter from the full force of the driving rain. Mark was grateful to that geranium-covered house. It was the inspiration of many a tale. Who built it? Who lived in it? Why was it empty? When would it be full of people? Merely answering these questions provided the framework of an epic. It also served as an illustration. Like that was the place where the Sleeping Beauty slept the years away. Such a house owned the witch who captured Hansel and Gretel. Snow White and Rose Red, the Three Bears, and a dozen other picture-book notabilities had lived in houses the very same as that one.

At the end of two hours, when Mark was beginning to wonder how on earth he should keep the children amused any longer, two girls in mackintoshes and sou'-westers came running down the lane on the other side of the garden.

"They do look like visitors," Arthur opined.

Mark agreed with him. Visitors in the eyes of the Nancepean children were as distinct from ordinary human beings as Zulus or Red Indians.

At that moment the two visitors caught sight of the refugees under the evergreens, and stopped to stare at them with a gaze of such concentrated interest that the refugees began to feel a little embarrassed, and wonder if these two visitors were the owners of the house and preparing to eject the

intruders from their garden. After this long stare the two visitors conversed together, evidently by their gestures much excited. Finally one of them clambered over the hedge and came running across the lawn toward the evergreens. She was a girl of about fifteen with a long pigtail and a very earnest expression.

"What is it?" she shouted, when she was halfway. "Is it a wreck?"

The children could not understand why Mark went off into a peal of laughter.

"No, I'm sorry to disappoint you," he said to the imaginative young visitor. "It's nothing like so romantic as that, I'm afraid. It's only a Sunday-school Treat trying to make the best of a wet afternoon."

"Oh, I'm most awfully sorry!" the girl stammered; and as she turned and walked back one felt that even her back was blushing.

"Won't you both come and help us?" Mark called after her.

But she was too much overcome by her mistake, and would not turn her head. As soon as she reached her companion, they both hurried back up the lane, each no doubt advising the other to keep such an idiotic mistake a secret from mocking relatives and friends.

Soon after this the rain stopped and the clouds thinned sufficiently to give hopes that the sun might come out after tea. And this it did, so that when at seven o'clock the wagonette set off up the lane again into the sun's eye shining low down through a stream of golden vapours, nobody seemed to think that the weather had spoilt the day. Dusk was stealing across the sea hard behind them when they reached Lanbaddern woods, passing through which all sat in silence bewitched by the ferny odours and the dripping of the trees. The colour was already fast fading from the heather when they emerged from the green twilight of the woods and faced the five miles of open down, with daylight growing dim beyond home and a clouded moon astern. This was the right moment to start singing hymns unless the party was to fall into a gloom, and Miss Horton, who had been

depressed partly because Mark had not agreed to play any of the games she had suggested, and partly because she had bumped her forehead in getting under the waggonette for shelter, cheered up and quelled the elemental spirits of the down by starting *Onward, Christian Soldiers*.

It was nearly nine o'clock when the waggonette came rumbling down the hill into Nancepean and the Treat was over.

Mark had the company of the Prawles for half his walk to the Vicarage; but he would not let them come all the way back and get his supper, because he had had enough for one day of watching people preparing meals. He felt sorry afterwards, when he turned in through the gate of the drive, that he had not let them come back. The house looked gaunt and forbidding in the cloudy moonlight, and he began to dread the silence he should find within. The lank hydrangeas stared wanly at him on either side, and the scent of magnolia hung heavy and sickly on the sodden air. It seemed the wrong kind of scent for such a grim house, like rouge and powder on an old woman.

When he turned the corner along the drive, he saw to his amazement that the front door was standing wide open. It set his heart beating; for the house on this side was in the shadow, and the open door gaped like a black wound. He stood hesitating to enter. He had been the only person to leave the house that morning. The Prawles had not been near it. And he remembered clearly that he had locked the door behind him. Why, then, did it stand open? Mark pulled himself together and by an effort of will crossed the threshold and struck a match. He wished more than ever that he had let the Prawles come back with him, for he should not be able to sleep to-night until he had examined all those empty rooms. And the prospect was not a pleasant one. The door of his study was standing ajar, but of course he might have left that open without remembering. He stepped in just as the match burnt itself out, and had a second shock when he looked at the grey windows and saw that the upper sash of one of them was pushed right down. It must be a burglary, he thought, and felt relieved when he had

given a name to his fears. They must have been gloriously sold. Or had some fanatic entered the house to murder him? His heart quickened again. Then he laughed. A murderer would not have left the door open. No, it must be a thief. Some tramp. Though he could not recall ever seeing a tramp anywhere in the Rhos. By now he had the lamp alight and, looking up, thought he must have gone mad, for an obscene monosyllable was chalked in huge red letters right across one wall. Sick at the insult he turned away from it to close the window and draw the curtains. There were bits of glass on the window seat, and when he pulled up the sash he found that one of the panes had been broken to reach the fastener. Now looking again at the defiled wall he saw a letter lying on the top of the bookcase that reached halfway up.

Mark knew that this letter would probably contain an elaboration of the scrawled obscenity on the wall, and for a moment he was tempted to tear it up unread and avoid the pain. He told himself that this would be cowardly, and undid the dirty envelope addressed to *Mister Liderdale*:

*Yore sins as found you not weve wotched you long enuf at your Games with inocint boys and maids how dar you get up in the pullpet and praych of Jeses and such things wen you spend yore days to korup inocints how don't you clere out off here and take yore prosstitut with you we dont wont such as you in uor inocint vilidge yore behavyir to church as made all wlsch you never come to Nanspeen but that is not the wursst yes you cal it lurning them to swimm but wat is it nothing but . . .*

Mark crumpled the letter up. The rest of it was too filthy to read. Not that he was any longer capable of being hurt by the word or the deed of any human being; but he had always had a physical horror of filth, and fastidiousness somehow remained when everything else had fallen from him. His mind went back to that ridiculous girl who had asked if they were a wreck. Well illustrated by one of those comic artists who knew just how to make a parson look a



perfect fool, it would do for *Punch*. A wreck! Ah, God, yes, and what a wreck!

The first shock of the letter had petrified Mark's soul; but presently with such pangs as rend a resuscitated body the implications of the letter ran through him like fire. He understood now why Mrs. Pellow had kept Winnie at home, and why Mrs. Wilton under the influence of talk at Polgarth had done the same with Rosie and Maggie. Only this afternoon Mrs. Pellow had called after her daughter to stay with her when the others were going with him to get shelter under the trees. No doubt they were all wondering how Mrs. Tangye and Mrs. Prawle could let their children . . . and then with one lancinating thrust came the thought that perhaps the children themselves were aware of what was being whispered. He sank down into a chair and pressed his hands against his seared eyeballs, trying to gain relief from his mental agony by the pain he inflicted on himself, trying to drive away the dreadful visions of his mind's eye by evoking the fantastic fireworks and microcosmic convulsions that are painted on the retina as the blood of the eyelids flow between it and the light. The void was marbled with veins of gold among which danced purple stars and crosses. He pressed more hardly. Scarlet planets evolved from sea-green nebulæ, performed countless polychromatic changes, and in a rain of lightning dissolved to make way for new ones. But the visions of his mind were more potent than those induced displays; when he opened his eyes again, the writing was still upon the wall. He hurried into the kitchen to fetch water to expunge it; and while he was at work, he felt that somebody was outside the window trying to peep through the crack in the curtains and see what he was doing. He leaped across the room and flung the curtains back. Yes, there like the white belly of a slug on the pane he saw a nose pressed against the window, and beyond it easily recognizable the face of Toby Prawle.

Mark darted out and dragged him inside by the scruff. He did not seem at all surprised by Mark's sudden action. No doubt, in the pursuit of his hobby, he had often been handled like this by angry victims of his passion for peeping.

"I only looked in to see where thay was all to," he explained.

"Did you put a letter here for me?" Mark demanded.

Toby looked so genuinely blank that Mark felt pretty sure that he knew nothing about the business, and that he really had come up to see if the others had returned. The chink of light showing must have tempted his passion. And, after all, what did it matter who had written the letter? It was the expression of a story that was generally believed in Nancepean.

"Why do you peep at night, Toby?" Mark went on.

"I've always belonged," Toby replied. "But 'tis only by night. Some do peep by day. But I don't belong to peep by day. Tom Pascoe, he's the boy for daylight peeping. I've seen 'un many a time watching 'ee on the shore, and once or twice I been minded to tell 'ee of it, but it passed from my mind. I've known him lay for an hour or more. Ess, sure. Lay on his belly and crape through the grass so as he could watch 'ee from the edge of the cliff. And once I come upon him from behind, and he turned his head and said: 'Hist, hist, Toby,' he said. 'I'm watching out for that — down there.' I knawed well for what he was watching 'ee. 'Ess,' I said, 'how don't 'ee lev the man do as he's a mind, poor soul?' I said, 'for if it isn't him, 'twill be another.'"

Toby said this with such a complete absence of cynicism, and so evidently accepting his own point of view as one anybody must take, that Mark could not be angry with him.

"God forgive you, Toby, you've added the last touch," he sighed.

He had been thinking to himself that he would go immediately to the Pascoes' cottage and ram the letter down Tom's throat, even if in doing so he should choke the life out of the brute; but when Toby took the possible truth of the horrible story so much as a matter of course he felt that any violence would only create a public scandal and serve no purpose. There would always be people who believed it, whatever he said or did. And if he resigned the living? No, he could not do that. It was unimaginable that he should go away from Nancepean, leaving behind him nothing

except a legend of iniquity. It would not matter for himself, but the children might come to suppose, as they grew up, that they had been sinned against, and that must not happen. No, no, that must not happen.

After a sleepless night Mark made up his mind to travel up to Bodmin and put the case before the Bishop; but when he walked into Rosemarket he read on the placards of the *Western Morning News* that the Bishop of Bodmin was dead.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

**H**ALFWAY back to Nancepean Mark overtook Miss Lambourne. He made up his mind to pass her with the excuse that he was in a hurry to get home; but she gave him such a pleasant smile and appeared such a civilized product beside the rest of the parishioners that he suited his pace to hers and walked along beside her. She at any rate could hardly be involved in the conspiracy to blacken his name; probably, indeed, she had heard nothing about it, so little did she mix with the rest of the village. Or perhaps she had heard a vague rumour and had wished to show her disapproval of such idle gossip when yesterday she had declined to accompany the Sunday-school Treat. It was not to be wondered at that she dissociated herself as much as possible from the others. There was no reason to suppose that she fancied herself superior to them, or if she did, might she not claim that she really was superior to such a barbarous crowd? The rest of them supposed that she gave herself airs, because she spoke correctly and dressed herself with a certain amount of neatness and taste. To be sure she was apt to let her contempt for them be rather too apparent, but that was as much their fault as hers because she must always be unpleasantly aware of the way they poked fun at her, alluded to her as Lady Lambourne, and for all one knew might have accused her of behaviour as monstrous as his own. No class had such a cynical disbelief in human decency as countryfolk. Or was it that the inevitable publicity of their lives did not allow them to screen their follies and their vices in the way that those who dwelt in cities could? Was human nature really as brutish as it was made to appear in the country? Were the accusations levelled against inno-



cent behaviour due to the fact that the accusers themselves had no conception of innocence? Mark remembered his experience of the confessional at St. Cyprian's, and sighed.

"You seem sad, Mr. Lidderdale," said Miss Lambourne. "I'm afraid that your trip to Roscarrack was spoilt by the weather."

"The weather was the best part of it," Mark answered recklessly.

Miss Lambourne raised her eyebrows.

"Dear me, that sounds very bitter! I suppose I oughtn't to ask questions, but . . . was there any trouble with Miss Horton?"

Mark looked round at her in surprise.

"None whatever. But why should there be?"

"Oh, no reason at all, no reason at all," she replied, pursing up her lips and staring in front of her at the placid and silvery expanse of sea which floated two green miles away beyond Nancepean. The self-conscious vacancy of her countenance invited one to suppose that it was a mask to hide a secret, and Mark accepted the invitation.

"My dear Miss Lambourne, you wouldn't make a remark like that unless you had some reason."

"Will you promise not to take offence if I tell you something?" she asked.

"I don't think I'm any longer capable of taking offence at anything," Mark said hopelessly.

She looked up at him from under her eyebrows with an expression of quizzical compassion.

"You've snubbed me so very decidedly once or twice when I've ventured to criticize some of our neighbours that I'm rather afraid to say anything. However, I suppose I must run the risk of incurring your displeasure again. Well, Mr. Lidderdale, quite a lot of people in Nancepean are firmly convinced that you are very much in love with Miss Horton. One or two say that they hear from Miss Horton herself that you are engaged. The others are less charitable, I'm afraid, in their inventions. You blame me, I know, for not associating more with the life of the village, but really I find it impossible to put up with this sort of idle chatter

and gossip. Rather than waste my breath in arguing with such people I prefer to keep myself to myself."

Miss Lambourne paused.

"Are you waiting for me to contradict this ridiculous rumour?" Mark inquired angrily.

"Now please, Mr. Lidderdale, don't be vexed with me. You insisted on my telling you. I've not suggested that I had paid the least attention to . . ." she hesitated for a perceptible space . . . "to either story."

"But why should the currency of this debased small talk have led you to ask if there was any trouble with Miss Horton yesterday?"

"Well, Mr. Lidderdale, I was afraid that some of your lady helpers might have made themselves unpleasant to poor Miss Horton, who, I'm sure, is quite a pleasant person, though I understand that she is afraid to visit me on account of my tongue. That is a little hard, is it not, Mr. Lidderdale? My tongue! If the good lady could only hear the tongues of some of those with whom she is on such intimate terms, I believe she might think twice about going to tea with anybody in the parish. It wasn't I who said that she was a barmaid in Plymouth who ran away with a naval officer to Penzance, where he deserted her. It wasn't I who said that she had to leave her own home because she was going to have a baby and that when she pretends to be selling her pictures she is really visiting this child which is put out to nurse with a labourer's wife in Roseford. It wasn't I who said she was in the habit of coming to the Vicarage after the Prawles had gone home and staying there till the early hours of the morning. If these things have been said, you have to thank some of your apparently loyal friends."

"What Nancepean says about Miss Horton," Mark burst out, "is exactly what every village anywhere in the world says about any single woman who is fool enough to suppose that she can live by herself and work in the country. Every unmarried priest in England is credited with a Miss Horton. Gossip of that kind does not affect me in the least—I take it for granted. But things have been said about me, Miss

Lambourne, in this parish which are making me wonder if I can continue to be Vicar here."

Miss Lambourne shook her head gravely.

"I know, I know," she agreed. "Once or twice I've thought of warning you against their dreadful tongues, but I was always afraid that you would think I wanted to prejudice you against Mrs. Pellow and Mrs. Wilton and Mrs. Evans."

"Mrs. Evans?" Mark interrupted sharply. Since last night he had been conscious of the question at the back of his mind, like the phantom of a veiled fear, shapeless and horrible. It was no longer possible to avoid giving it a form. "What has Mrs. Evans been saying?"

"Oh, I mustn't give you the idea that Mrs. Evans has said anything at all terrible. I believe that she did say she wasn't sure if she ought to let her little boy . . . such a dear little boy, isn't he? I'm really very fond of him and wish that his mother would let him come and see me sometimes."

"Ought to let Donald do what?" Mark asked in an agony.

"Ought to let him go down to church so much and take so many walks."

The expanse of placid and silvery sea had been growing narrower as they walked down hill to Nancepean, and now it lay along the horizon like the blade of a knife.

"But I don't think she probably meant anything more than that she thought so much running about was bad for his leg," Miss Lambourne resumed, after she and Mark had walked a hundred yards or more in silence.

"Is Job pleased with the harvest prospects at Carwithen?" Mark inquired.

"Oh, I think so, though farmers are never very pleased about anything, are they?" she replied.

And thence onward for the rest of the road down into Nancepean they talked of such things as the harvest and the amount of cream that the visitors consumed.

The following afternoon in Sunday-school Mark proclaimed the Day of Judgment, and the money-boxes were opened.

"I was thinking all the time that you'd belong to have the

Day of Judgment to-day," Arthur said. "Only I didn't say nothing about what I were thinking because I didn't know what counter you'd give me if I were thinking wrong. Oh, my gosh, look at all the white ones I've got! I didn't know I'd have so many as all that."

And for that Mark counted Arthur's white counters as one more than they really were.

"Well, dear children, I think you've all been wonderfully good on the whole," Mark said. "I'm particularly pleased to see so few yellow tokens of jealousy and so few red ones of unkindness. One or two of you have got more brown ones for dullness than I hoped, and there are rather more purple ones for bragging than I care to see. But all have plenty of blue ones for praying hard and plenty of green ones for playing hard. Nobody did anything that I heard of or saw to earn a black token. Each one of you has gained a medal. Here they are. Look, it's Our Blessed Lady and the Holy Child. You can wear them round your necks with a bit of string, and, when you are tempted to do wrong, press the medal against your bodies and pray to the Holy Child to help you fight against the temptation. Donald Evans, Arthur Tangye and Maggie Wilton, whose boxes have least of the bad tokens and most of the good, will each have a little silver crucifix. The prizes for the stamp collections will be awarded on the first Sunday in Advent at the end of November, when I give out the albums for another year.

"And now, dear children, I've got to tell you that I think we must give up our expeditions together, because I find that people are saying that you only come to church and to Sunday-school for the sake of our games and walks. I want to show people that you can be good little Catholics for no other reason than because you want to worship our dear Lord and want to learn about His life on earth and want to try each of you in his or her own little way to imitate Him. I don't suppose that any of you have enjoyed the games and the walks so much as I have enjoyed them. You know how on our walks we have admired the humble little daisies as much as any of the flowers we have seen, and how we have loved best of all the little brown wrens that hop in and out



## The Heavenly Ladder

of the holes in the stone walls, and how much we have learned of our Father's goodness from the daisy and the wren. Well, I've learnt more from you little things about our Father's goodness than I have ever learnt from grand grown-up people. And now, Miss Horton, I think we'll have hymn number five hundred and seventy-three, please."

*All things bright and beautiful,  
All creatures great and small,  
All things wise and wonderful,  
The Lord God made them all.*

*Each little flower that opens,  
Each little bird that sings,  
He made their glowing colours,  
He made their tiny wings.*

*The rich man in his castle,  
The poor man at his gate,  
God made them, high or lowly,  
And order'd their estate.*

*The purple-headed mountain,  
The river running by,  
The sunset and the morning,  
That brightens up the sky;—*

*The cold wind in the winter,  
The pleasant summer sun,  
The ripe fruits in the garden,—  
He made them every one;*

*The tall trees in the greenwood,  
The meadows where we play,  
The rushes by the water,  
We gather every day;—*

*He gave us eyes to see them,  
And lips that we might tell,  
How great is God Almighty,  
Who has made all things well.      Amen.*

While the class sang this hymn, Mark knelt and prayed for strength and consolation.

"And now, dear little children, remember that hymn and go on doing for yourselves what you have been doing with me. Every Sunday afternoon I shall want to know how you have spent the days of the past week, about the birds you have seen, and the flowers you have found, and the adventures you have had, and the games you have played."

Mark saw that Donald's eyebrows were knitted in that grave frown which always expressed his deepest emotions, saw Arthur's eyes opening wider and wider in painful bewilderment, and two teardrops go tumbling down the cheeks of Maggie Wilton. He could bear no more, and after giving them his blessing he told them that the class was over.

"And don't wait for me outside," he said, "for I have a lot of things to talk over with Miss Horton."

Miss Horton had comprehended that the Vicar was upset about something, but she had not ventured to hope that at last he would turn to her for sympathy. If he had asked her to poultice a gathered finger she could not have felt happier. Indeed, her sympathy was so much like an extremely hot linseed poultice waiting in a bowl to be applied that Mark could not stand the prospect and fled from her without even explaining where he was hurt.

He passed hurriedly along through the village aware of small heads looking wistfully at him over gates and of two depressed little figures watching him where the road swept round toward Church Cove by Polgarth gate.

As Mark went by Roscorla he saw Isaac Jago carrying a milk-pail across the town-place. He wished him good afternoon, and for answer the dark and sullen farmer spat in the dung-heap.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE NEW BISHOP

MARK decided that the mistake he had made, nay, more than a mistake, the sin he had committed in surrendering against his conviction to the claim of the late Bishop of Bodmin, was responsible for the state of affairs in Nancepean not yet a year after his arrival. The death of Bishop Meade released him from a promise. In future he should go his own way, the way of Almighty God and His Church, without the least regard for episcopal interference.

When he read that a *congé d'elire* had been sent to the Dean and Chapter of Bodmin in favour of Canon George Grindlay Tomlinson, he rejoiced, because Canon Tomlinson represented much that Mark greatly disliked in ecclesiastical thought and behaviour. Without further consideration he not only restored all the ceremonies and ritual that he had agreed to give up in deference to the late Bishop, but he added a number of observances and devotions he had not hitherto attempted. The visitors began to grumble louder than ever, and Major Drumgold wrote to express his pain at seeing Mark losing all the ground he had gained by the exercise of a little moderation. It was with the greatest reluctance and only from a keen sense of his duty as people's warden that he had written to the new Bishop to complain of the grave excesses in Nancepean Church and to beg him either to send the Archdeacon or, better still, to make a personal visitation.

On a postcard Mark replied :

*Delighted to hear it.*

Soon after this Mark had a letter from the Bishop, with which he enclosed a copy of Drumgold's complaint, and

asked for an explanation of it. To this Mark returned what his Lordship considered was an extremely unsatisfactory reply, and he was invited to interview the Bishop personally at Lis Escop. However, when Mark arrived in Bodmin, he found that the Bishop had received a sudden summons to a conference in London, so that he had his interview with Archdeacon Doublebois instead, at the end of which the Archdeacon told Mark that in the whole of his life he could not recall any interview that had caused him so much pain.

"You were evidently too good a boy at school ever to be flogged, Mr. Archdeacon," Mark said.

The dignitary grew very red at this, partly because he resented the gross flippancy of the observation, as he told Mark, and partly because, as he did not tell Mark, he strongly objected to what was clearly an attempt to make a stupid pun upon his name. In fact, he completely lost his temper and accused Mark of adopting a cynical, almost, one might say, a cruelly cynical, attitude of contempt for lawful authority.

"I had hesitated to believe what was commonly reported of you in the diocese, Mr. Lidderdale; but the way you have received my admonition this afternoon has changed my mind."

"Believe what?" said Mark quickly, who supposed for a moment that he was referring to the cesspool of village gossip.

"Why, it was said to me the other day by one who had every opportunity of knowing what was in the mind of Bishop Meade that your self-willed conduct at Nancepean had without any doubt hastened his end."

"That's the kind of cowardly lie that would circulate in a cathedral close," Mark retorted. "And if the man who said it really was in the Bishop's confidence, it was a deliberate lie, because he would have known that I obeyed Bishop Meade in everything that he asked me to do or not to do."

"That is not the impression I have received this afternoon," the Archdeacon said. "The impression I have received this afternoon is of a contumacy that I have no hesitation in stigmatizing as unparalleled within my experience."



"Against my convictions, Mr. Archdeacon, I gave a promise to Bishop Meade which I faithfully kept. I was persuaded to obey, because the personality of a learned and holy man was too strong for me. I have always regretted my promise and considered that I did wrong in giving it. I hold that his successor or his representative has no right to trade upon that. I am acting more frankly by refusing to give up devotions I consider essential to the spiritual health of the Anglican Church than by making promises I should intend to circumvent."

"In other words you defy the lawful authority of your Bishop," the Archdeacon insisted.

"I have not noticed during our conversation, Mr. Archdeacon, that you have been so scrupulous over the motives and behaviour you have attributed to me as to make it worth my while or your while to argue precisely what I am doing. Anyway, I refuse to give up Benediction. I refuse to make the saying of Mass depend on the number of communicants. I refuse to give up the private devotions at Mass to which I believe a priest is entitled. I refuse to take down the image of the Blessed Virgin or the Stations of the Cross or the Crucifix over the pulpit. I refuse to give up the ceremonial use of incense. And I refuse to give up praying for the dead."

"I shall advise the Bishop to institute proceedings against you in the Bishop's court," the Archdeacon threatened.

"In that case, Mr. Archdeacon, I had better reserve my defence," said Mark.

Mark really did hope that the Bishop would institute proceedings against him, for while he had no desire to remain a day longer in Nancepean he was loth to give his enemies an opportunity of saying that they had frightened him into resignation. A sentence of deprivation by the Bishop would be just what was required to turn his defeat into the equivalent of a victory for the Catholic party, because every sentence of deprivation for an ecclesiastical offence provided another martyr to the truth of the cause. But no doubt the new Bishop of Bodmin, who as Canon Tomlinson had been famous for being an astute manipulator of difficult situa-

tions, realized this. At any rate, there were no signs of episcopal action at present.

Meanwhile, Mark diverged from his parishioners more sharply every day. He had not been personally unpopular with any except the Nonconformist farmers, who resented his apparent inability to grasp their importance not merely in this world, but in the next as well. Yet ever since that accursed anonymous letter he could no longer feel at ease with the people. He was always asking himself what lay behind the most ordinary remark. He became shy and self-conscious, and, like so many shy and self-conscious people, took refuge in what was supposed to be a sarcastic habit of speech, but which was really being careful that there was always a way out of his lightest remark. He made a habit of asking Miss Horton to tea at the Vicarage in order to show the village that he was not going to be deterred from doing so by any scandalous tongues, and when Miss Horton came he treated her with abominable discourtesy to prevent her supposing that he enjoyed her company. He avoided any kind of explanation with Mrs. Evans, and if once she had been sibylline with him he was now twice as sibylline with her. One day, when they were capping each other's unpleasant allusions, Donald, who was present, burst into tears and rushed from the room.

"You'll break that child's heart, Mr. Lidderdale," his mother cried in a sudden outburst of passionate bitterness.

For a moment Mark was shaken; but he remembered that Mrs. Evans had doubted if she should be able to let Donald go down to church so much, and he rejected the opportunity of a reconciliation.

"I don't think that I shall be the only one to blame," he said coldly.

After that the Evanses came no more to their own church, but drove every Sunday morning up to Chypie. This worried Kennedy, who wrote to Mark and asked him if he should not like him to speak to the Evanses about their not attending their parish church.

"My dear Kennedy," Mark wrote back. "*Please do not say anything. The point is that they are hearing Mass*

*every Sunday. That is the only thing that matters. Where they go seems to me quite immaterial. Please take an interest in the boy, who is worth it."*

Not only did the Evanses give up attending their parish church, but Donald came no more to Sunday-school. A week later none of the Tangyes came; and when Mark asked Arthur the reason, the boy only blushed and turned away his head. At the same time, Mrs. Wilton and her two little girls left Nancepean, the coastguard having obtained a transfer. In spite of the mischief wrought by Mrs. Pellow, Winnie, oddly enough, still attended. So did the Scobells, and, of course, the two little Prawles. But the class was no longer alive, with the departure of the other children.

At the end of October, just when everybody in Nancepean was beginning to ask if a second year was going to pass without a big catch of fish, there was a heva. Mark, hearing that it was an exceptionally large school, walked down to Nancepean Cove to watch the seine hauled in. The beach was crowded with excited people, and by good luck it was a calm day at the tail of St. Luke's summer. The leaping pilchards did not flash with such fierce colours as they would have flashed beneath an August sun; but still the quivering iridescent myriads were fantastically beautiful as to shouts of "Pull, boys! Corks and twine, corks and twine! Pull, and again pull! Corks and twine! Corks and twine! Pull!" the net was laboriously hauled in.

"Can't I give a hand?" Mark asked John Joseph Dunstan, who, covered with scales like a knight in chain armour, had pulled ashore to fetch something that was required for one of the two big boats.

The eldest son of Polgarth looked at Mark blankly for a moment. Then he muttered surlily:

"No, no, there's nothing you can do," with which he passed on.

Mark turned away from that reaping of the sea and went back to the Vicarage. He told himself that the reason for John Joseph Dunstan's surliness was his having refused to hold a harvest festival this year; but whatever the reason his isolation from the life of the parish had been rammed

home to him hard enough. Just over a year ago Joe Dunstan, the father, had been the first to give him a real welcome, and now John Joseph, the son, was the first to make it really clear that he was not wanted in Nancepean.

In view of John Joseph Dunstan's attitude a week or two before, Mark was surprised when Aunt Penelope came in one morning to say that he wanted to speak to the Vicar.

"I've come to give 'ee notice of a wedding," John Joseph said. "Bessie Hoskin and me be going to get married after the banns."

"In church?" Mark asked, raising his eyebrows.

"Sure. Where else would we be married to?"

"But why should you want to be married in the church? You never come near the church from one year's end to the other," Mark said. "Why don't you get married in the chapel?"

"We do always belong to get married to church," John Joseph replied.

"Well, I flatly refuse to marry you in the church," Mark retorted. "If the chapel is good enough to worship God in, it's good enough to be married in."

John Joseph swung his cap round once or twice, then put it on, and slouched out of the room.

Later on that day Mark walked down into the village to interview the father of the prospective bride.

"Look here, Hockin, I'm astonished at you. How is it you're willing to allow your daughter to be married in a church? I thought you were a stouter chapel man than that."

"Our chapel isn't licensed for marriages," the blacksmith said.

"Well, I don't feel inclined to let the church be used as a registrar's office, for that's all such a wedding as this would make it," Mark said.

"I do know well that most of 'em do spake against 'ee, Mr. Lidderdale, but I've not spoke against 'ee. But don't think to put shame on the chapel by what you're doing. The Lord will look after His own."

"I'm not trying to put shame on the chapel. I don't see



that by asking your daughter Bessie to get married elsewhere I'm putting shame on the chapel, or her, or you, or anybody."

"You do know well the maid must marry or be shamed," the blacksmith said with an almost tragic dignity. "But the Lord will look after His own, and His House will not be cast down."

"I knew nothing about this, Ernest," Mark said gently. "I'm sorry, for you've been a good and careful father. You didn't deserve that. Well, if she's in trouble, I'll marry them and say no more. But you must try to understand my point of view. I regard marriage as a sacrament, and I did not see why I should be asked to administer one sacrament to people who are so utterly neglectful of the others."

Mark might have done better to be firm in his refusal, for he was only credited with trying to be unpleasant and then knuckling under to the threats of the stalwart blacksmith.

In November the two Scobell boys started their annual winter colds, so that their mother kept them at home as much as possible, and before Christmas the Church Sunday-school was a thing of the past, although Mark tried to teach Dick and Lily Prawle every Sunday afternoon at the Vicarage. But it was a dreary little class.

In February Mark, after writing depressed letters to all his friends, was paid a visit by Cyril Nash, who brought down as a present from the Vicar of St. Cyprian's an image of St. Tugdual, which he had had specially carved.

"Mortemer wanted to send it to you in time for your patronal festival," Nash explained. "But the artist was temperamental, and it has only just arrived."

The saint was installed in the presence of Miss Horton, Miss Lambourne, and the Prawle family, who between them now made up the whole of Mark's congregation.

The next morning when Mark and his guest went down to the church for Mass they found that the saint had vanished.

"How very odd!" said Nash. "Surely some angel can't have brought him another white horse."

"I expect some of my friendly parishioners have thrown him into the sea, more probably," said Mark.

"Oh, surely they wouldn't do that?"

After Mass they climbed up the Castle cliff, and there, smashed to pieces on the rocks of Dollar Cove, was St. Tugdual, the patron saint of Nancepean.

"What blighters, Mark!" Cyril Nash exclaimed. "I say, can't we go and break up something in the chapel—the reading-desk or whatever their favorite idol is? But seriously, this sort of thing is rather impossible. You'd have more consideration from heathen medicine-men."

"I expect that I'm as much to blame as they are," Mark said. "Latterly I've done a good deal to irritate them and nothing at all to pacify them."

He tried to make himself tell his friend all about the wretched business which had corrupted everything; but when it came to the point of putting it into words he could not, and the ulcer ate deeper all the time.

The day before the end of his visit Cyril Nash suggested to Mark that the chancel would be vastly improved by taking away the two front rows of pews. Mark agreed, but said that their removal would be a sacrilege in the eyes of the parish.

"Let them have a lesson," Nash urged. "Perhaps it will teach them to think twice next time before *they* commit sacrilege. Come along, we'll take an axe and hack the beastly things up. We needn't throw them over the cliff, although they deserve it. You've plenty of room for rubbish in the tower."

"But do you realize that these pews are pitch-pine?" Mark asked. "Do you realize that the shittim-wood used for the Ark was not more rare and much less precious?"

However, Cyril Nash had his way, and the pews were uprooted and cast into the tower.

The morning after, Mark drove into Rosemarket to see his guest off, and, walking back, found the village in a state of commotion. So deeply had the feelings of the people been outraged that they groaned and booed at the Vicar

on his way past. In the afternoon he had a visit from Major Drumgold.

"I say, Lidderdale, you know, this is deuced serious. You've stirred up a regular hornet's nest. You know what I mean? You've thoroughly roused them. What on earth induced you to commit such an act of Vandalism? Especially when it was your own grandfather who was responsible for reseating the church. The whole parish was proud of those pews. Well, they were pitch-pine."

"If the parishioners were so proud of them, it's a pity they didn't use them a bit more," Mark said.

"Ah, well, that's another story, I'm afraid. But look here, what are you going to do about it? I've had to call an indignation meeting for this evening, and if the resolution is passed it means that the Bishop will have to do something. But I thought I'd just give you a chance to put them back. I might quiet 'em down if you'd do that."

"I certainly shan't put them back," Mark declared. "I didn't call an indignation meeting to protest when somebody threw the image of the patron saint over the cliff."

"Now don't think that I approved of that, Lidderdale. I didn't. You know what I mean? I strongly disapproved. And I said as much to the chaps who did it."

"Oh, you know who did it?" Mark interrupted. "You're a fine churchwarden!"

"Now look here, Lidderdale," said the Major, tugging nervously at his red moustache, "don't let's introduce a personal element. I mean to say, don't let's get personal. Let's keep the discussion in the—er—you know what I mean, the—er—oh, bother, what is the word? Abstract! Let's keep it in the abstract. What I want you to understand is that I disapproved. Never mind who did it. That's neither here nor there. I disapproved strongly, and I went so far as to warn them that they were inviting you to retaliate. I'm bound to say I never thought you'd retaliate on the pews. I did think that you'd have had a greater respect for the sacred surroundings of the church. I can tell you it's been a deuced shock to me. When George Pellow brought me

the news I was just going to shave, and, by Jove, I had to put it off till after breakfast. And I went bang through the South African war without ever doing that. Topsy knew something must have upset me pretty badly. In fact she said, 'What has upset you?' And when I told her you'd hacked down four pews and thrown them out into the tower, she said, 'The man must be mad!' That's the way my wife looked at it. But then she's always ready to find an excuse for everybody."

A week or two after the meeting Mark was summoned to Bodmin again. This time the Bishop was at home.

Dr. Tomlinson's ecclesiastical career had had much in common with that of the Vicar of Bray. He was more subtle, however, and his conversion to Liberalism, which had gained him his latest preferment, had been beautifully gradual. Moreover, many people thought that it really must be sincere, because otherwise a snob of such calibre would surely have preferred to remain a Conservative. Perhaps Dr. Tomlinson was sincere. Perhaps he really did believe in Liberalism. He was not a great scholar, but he had written a critical study of Tennyson and a number of pamphlets on social reform which masked the exiguousness of his academic distinctions. The most successful part of his career at Trinity College, Cambridge, had been his close friendship with two contemporaries who had since attained the highest political honours, and to one or other of whom he seldom failed to refer in the course of a conversation. Purely as a snob Dr. Tomlinson had achieved a considerable reputation. Legends of incredible obsequiousness had gathered round his name, most of which were no doubt apocryphal and the mere stock-in-trade of all proverbial snobs. Still, much must be granted to a man who could achieve proverbial fame in anything. His devotion to Tennyson showed that his snobbishness was the expression of a genuinely romantic and at the same time thoroughly respectable temperament. He rolled off a title with the kind of relish that one might suppose that Milton rolled off Busiris and his Memphian chivalry. No doubt his consecration to the see of Bodmin gave him something of the



pleasure that a captain of industry got from the barony conferred upon him. At the same time he might have preferred a less parvenu see. He would enjoy signing himself George Bodmin, but he would certainly have enjoyed much more signing himself George Cantab.; and he must have regretted that he had not been given the see of Cambridge, which had fallen vacant at the same time as Bodmin. However, he may have consoled himself by wondering if one day he might not sign himself George Cantuar.; which would more than compensate him for the loss of George Cantab.:. Not that Tennyson and titles and a timely conversion to the principles of Liberalism were all that Dr. Tomlinson possessed. He was a practical administrator, an admirable speaker, and a thoroughly capable and shrewd man of affairs. The stereotyped phrases that one involuntarily used to describe his abilities indicated at once their extent and their limitations.

Mark, to whom Kennedy had related the most fantastic tales of Dr. Tomlinson's snobbery when he himself was an undergraduate at Trinity and the Bishop was Warden of Cranmer Hall, the theological hostel, hoped to be amused by him. But the Bishop, a large, unwieldy man with an ugly smile, worked by raising his upper lip and exposing his big teeth, did not contribute anything to his mirth. There was not much time for talking before lunch, to which Mark was invited. Nor did lunch do anything to improve his cheerfulness. Mrs. Tomlinson, a shrivelled little woman, complained of the bitter climate all the time.

"I thought when we came here that we were going to see the most wonderful gardens, but really, Mr. Lidderdale, our little garden at Towcester was better than anything I have seen here. I wish that the Deanery had been vacant earlier, for I am sure the Bishop would have much preferred to be Dean of Towcester. The Deanery garden is really lovely, but . . ."

"My dear," said the Bishop, very politely but very firmly, "I don't think that Mr. Lidderdale has said if he will drink wine or—er—water."

"Wine, please," Mark announced recklessly, for he had

a presentiment that the parlourmaid would hold a decanter up to the light before she poured out a glass of wine that would have the same relation to ordinary wine as the water in a tooth-glass has to ordinary water. And she did.

After lunch in the study (a much altered room since the time of Dr. Meade) the Bishop came to the point at once.

"For we must not forget, Mr. Lidderdale, that you have a train to catch. Now I understand from Archdeacon Doublebois that at your last visit, when I unfortunately missed you, I understand that you said quite definitely that you had no intention of obeying me. Do you persist in that attitude?"

"If your Lordship asks me to do or not to do more than my conscience will let me," Mark replied.

"I have had continual letters complaining of your services, and I gather from the latest communication sent me by one of the churchwardens that you have been tinkering with the fabric of the church."

Mark explained the circumstances in which he had removed the four pews.

"Yes, yes, yes, Mr. Lidderdale," said the Bishop, "but two blacks do not make a white. In the first place I should say that it was highly injudicious of you to erect such an image. However, inasmuch as that image no longer exists, so far as I can gather from you, I shall not waste time remonstrating with you about it. We will also put aside for the moment all talk of pews. I understand that last Easter you held a series of utterly unauthorized services, and your parishioners are afraid that you have every intention of repeating them this year. I must request—indeed, I must exact a promise from you—that in future you will not go outside the Book of Common Prayer for your services, unless, of course, such services have received the approval of your Bishop. I understand that you have been saying prayers in Latin. That, of course, must stop at once. I hear, too, of venerating, for I do not seriously suppose that, as my petitioners assert, you have actually been worshipping an image of St. Mary. You will readily appreciate the danger of such outward forms of respect when I tell you

that your parishioners believe that you are worshipping this image, which, of course, as you will readily understand, would upset them a very great deal. Other complaints refer to extraordinary services on various occasions such as the commemoration of All Souls and the celebration of the so-called Assumption of St. Mary, and what I can only suppose was the observation of Corpus Christi so called. My petitioners merely accuse you of walking about the churchyard under a red umbrella, but my travels on the Continent, coupled with the fact that this eccentric performance apparently took place at the end of May or beginning of June, lead me to suppose an observation of Corpus Christi. Now, I understand that you had given a promise to my predecessor, Bishop Meade, not to use the Sacrament in what I should not hesitate to call a theatrical way, but for which he no doubt used a gentler term."

"I promised Bishop Meade not to say Mass . . ."

Dr. Tomlinson shuddered with disgust.

"Please, Mr. Lidderdale, I cannot countenance that word in *Lis Escop*. Oh, I know it is a good old English word, but like many good old English words it has acquired associations which make it extremely undesirable to use it nowadays. Very well, you promised Bishop Meade not to say Holy Communion . . ."

"I promised not to celebrate on Sundays unless there were three communicants. That promise I kept so long as he was alive. I also kept my promise not to have Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. I did not promise anything about Corpus Christi. Since the death of Bishop Meade I have not considered myself bound by any promise."

"But, my dear Mr. Lidderdale, when you were instituted to the benefice of Nancepean you took an oath of canonical obedience to the Bishop of Bodmin and his successors. Am I not his successor?"

Dr. Tomlinson opened his arms wide in a sweeping interrogative gesture.

"I gave the promise to Bishop Meade against my own convictions," Mark argued.

"But the oath of canonical obedience?" Dr. Tomlinson repeated with another sweeping gesture.

And then began that trite argument about the meaning of canonical obedience, which lasted until it was time for Mark to catch his train back to the west.

"Mr. Lidderdale," Dr. Tomlinson said before he left, "I am not going to take action against you for anything that you have done before I was consecrated Bishop of this diocese. I shall write to you and ask you to promise me that none of the things to which I take exception shall be done in your church. If I do not receive a satisfactory answer to this letter, I shall take disciplinary action."

Soon after Mark got back he received a letter from the Bishop setting out in detail the various services and ceremonies to which he objected and asking for a reply as soon as possible. To this Mark paid no attention. At last in May he received the following letter:

Lis Escop,  
Bodmin.  
May 5, 1914.

Dear Mr. Lidderdale,

So far from receiving any satisfactory reply to my letter of February 23, you have not even had the courtesy to send me any reply at all. I can only conclude with the greatest reluctance that you are unwilling to make the promise for which I, writing as your Bishop, asked.

That promise demanded of you, firstly, that none of the things mentioned both at your last interview and in my letter of February 23, being admittedly illegal, shall take place in your church; and, secondly, that you will perform the services prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer and no others unless you have sought and obtained my special sanction. I must insist that such a promise is an expression of your willingness to carry out the Oath of Canonical obedience to the Bishop of Bodmin and his successors which you vowed with your hand upon the Bible. I fear that you have interpreted that Oath in a sense which the words of it cannot possibly bear—nay, I almost hope that you have, for



in no other way can I acquit you of the sin of deliberately violating that Oath.

I am informed on the weightest legal authority that I should be well advised to transmit your case immediately by Letters of Request to the Court of Arches. But I am unwilling to take that course. I prefer to place you under discipline without having recourse to the Court.

At your Institution there was committed to you the cure and government of the souls of the parishioners of Nancepean and the licence and power to celebrate Divine offices in the parish church of Nancepean. I am not satisfied that you have served or are serving your cure and mine either well or loyally; but I have no power to remove that cure from your charge except by public prosecution in Court.

I write now to inform you that until you are willing to make and to carry out that promise to which I have alluded, I place you under this discipline:

First, I refuse, as your Bishop, to visit your Church.

Secondly, I give instruction that you are not to be summoned to any Synods, or Conferences, in your Rural Deanery, or Archdeaconry, or Diocese.

Thirdly, I confine you, in your priestly office, to your own parish; and I give notice to all whom it may concern that you have not my Permission or Authority to preach or to perform your Priestly Office in any way whatever in any other place or Parish in this Diocese.

This painful course I adopt in the profound and earnest hope that you may soon make it possible for me to relax this discipline, which I shall do willingly and gratefully.

I shall publish officially and in the Public Press my letter to you of February 23 together with this letter, in order that any Clergy may know that you are not allowed to preach in any of their churches, and that the Church in Cornwall may be witnesses of the discipline under which I place you, and, I most earnestly and humbly pray, witnesses before long of your restoration to a better mind.

Believe me to be,

Sincerely your Father in God,

George Bodmin.

This was followed up by the following letter issued to the clergy of the diocese:

TO INCUMBENTS

*Lis Escop,*  
Bodmin.

*May 11, 1914.*

The Bishop desires to bring to the knowledge of the Incumbents of the Diocese the following letters which have been issued by him to the Rev. Mark Lidderdale, Vicar of Nancepean; and thus to make known to them the discipline under which he has placed Mr. Lidderdale.

The Bishop feels sure that his Clergy will readily understand why he has decided to act thus, and, in the first instance at any rate, to endeavour to deal with the irregularities tabulated in the accompanying letter by the exercise of paternal discipline rather than appeal to the Ecclesiastical Courts.

It is enough to remind them that, apart from the prospect of costly litigation—not rendered less formidable by the knowledge that every device of legal ingenuity and pressure of party agitation, which the resources of rich and powerful organizations on one side or the other can command, may be used—the suit might probably, as the Law now stands, have to be carried by Appeal to the Privy Council, the authority of which in Ecclesiastical matters is largely repudiated. Moreover, he would ask them to remember that the Judgment of the Court might have to be enforced by imprisonment, a penalty so unsuitable and so offensive to public opinion that its infliction might turn a flagrant offender into a quasi martyr.

He devoutly trusts that it may not be necessary to enforce the discipline by a method which could only have these deplorable results. His Clergy have already given him the right to have such confidence in their loyalty that he cannot bring himself to fear that a single one of them will hesitate to accept the just and reasonable admonition of his Father in God as having a greater claim upon his conscience than the decision of a Court of Law.

This was the state of affairs in the parish of Nancepean when war broke out.

## CHAPTER XVI

### WAR

WHEN at half-past seven of the fourth of August Mark was sitting in his empty church and saying Morning Prayer, the sun streaming through the East window upon the pages of the book, his thoughts were far from Nancepean. The externals of warlike preparation had not been visible down here, but the quickened fibres of his whole being responded to the emotion of the country, and it was the tranquillity of the fine and warm morning that seemed unreal rather than the fever of the time. It was not until he came to the First Lesson that he was conscious of what he was saying or reading. It was the third chapter of *Ecclesiastes*:

*To everything there is a season, it began, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:*

*A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;*

*A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down; and a time to build up;*

The words sounded like the passing-bell of an epoch.

*A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.*

Mark was suddenly filled with an immense restlessness. He felt that he was swimming round and round in a crystal globe, his companions goggle-eyed desquamating goldfish, and regarding the world outside it all distorted even as he himself was regarded by the world.

After Mass he started to walk over to Chypie; but half-way up the towans he changed his mind and turned aside

in the direction of Angarrack. The question about which he wanted to consult Kennedy could wait. Drumgold would know more about the situation than Kennedy, who might laugh at the idea of war, which would be exasperating.

"Hullo, Lidderdale!" the Major exclaimed, for Mark had never been near his house in a year. "What on earth's the matter to bring you up here at this time of the morning? Nothing serious at the church, eh?"

"No, no, Major. I came up to talk about the war."

"By gad, things are looking pretty grave, eh? Come in. We're just going to have breakfast."

"I'd like a cup of coffee. I didn't go back to the Vicarage after Mass."

"After Mass! What a fellow you are," the Major chuckled. "I believe you take a delight in ragging me. You know what I mean, you enjoy it. Eh? But come along. I expect we shall find Topsy in her dressing-gown. But you won't mind? Well, she got into the habit when we were so long without girls. Sweetheart!" he bawled, "here's Mr. Lidderdale come to have breakfast with us."

"Oh, good gracious!" Mrs. Drumgold panted, as her husband and the unexpected visitor entered the dining-room.

"You don't think the Germans will climb down before the ultimatum expires?" Mark asked eagerly.

"Oh, no, no, I think that war's inevitable. You know what I mean? It had to come. It's been coming for years. Roberts was right. Pity we've got this damned government."

Mark was quite unconscious of the Major's fatuity, and could have wrung his hands for the assurance that war was certain.

"I thought at first we weren't going to stick to France. My heart's been thumping with a mixture of rage and apprehension and hope for the last three days," Mark said.

"Ah, well, but even these confounded Radicals must know it's now or never. We shan't get a second chance. If we had let the Germans trample on France, we should have been the next. Well, I reckon the Kaiser's moustaches aren't sticking up quite so stiff as usual to-day," the Major said,



zestfully tugging at his own, with the picture of the Kaiser in his mind.

"I wonder what Italy will do?" Mark said.

"In my humble opinion Italy won't do anything. You know what they say there, *manaña*."

In times of peace Mark would have taken a good deal of pleasure in correcting the Major's notions of the Italian language, but now his expert views of military life and, what was more, his actual experience of war in South Africa was something to be grateful for. He spent a couple of hours after breakfast poring over maps with his host, who was so much impressed by this new aspect of Mark that he nearly gave up his game of golf to spend the rest of the morning in responding to deferential questions and laying down the laws of strategy to so much appreciative attention. But he roused himself from dalliance with flattery.

"I shan't get in my morning round if I'm not careful."

Mark and he parted with real goodwill on both sides, each thinking to himself that the other was a finer and more sensible fellow than he had ever supposed.

From Angarrack Mark went on to Chypie Vicarage.

"Hullo!" Kennedy cried jovially. "Here's the goat that beareth upon him all our iniquities. Well, how do you feel since you've been confined to your own parish by George Bodmin?"

"Oh, that," said Mark, dismissing it with a gesture. "Look here, I want to talk to you about this war. Drumgold says they're sure to call for volunteers. What about my going?"

"As a C.F., you mean?"

"No, no," Mark said impatiently, "not as a Chaplain. I don't want to make a mess of that job. I mean enlist."

"You're mad, my dear fellow," Kennedy exclaimed. "We aren't at war yet; and for my part I shouldn't be a bit surprised to hear that the Germans have climbed down. But if we do go to war it won't last a month. It can't. Not under modern conditions. I was reading in the paper that there actually isn't enough lead in the world to last more than a month."

"Never mind about the lead. I want your advice about enlisting," Mark said.

"Look here, come and sit under the strawberry-tree and get cool. Have some iced lemonade or something."

But Mark was not going to be put off his plan by chaff.

"I'm in dead earnest, Kennedy. I'm in a cage here. I'm not going to give them the pleasure by resigning the living of saying they've beaten me. But if I could get away and enlist. . . . Look here, Kennedy, did you notice the Lesson this morning? Didn't it strike you as amazingly appropriate to the moment?"

"But surely you're not such a bibliolater as all that? And personally I should say that until England is invaded"—the plump priest broke off to convulse himself with laughter—"until then"—and here he became serious—"your duty lies here."

"Saying Mass to empty pews and preaching to the Prawle household!" Mark exclaimed bitterly.

"No, saying Mass for the thousands who'll be fighting. The preaching you can miss out. I know you've been through a rough time, but if there's anything in what you and I believe this is the moment to prove it. You can't accuse me of undue solemnity, but I'm solemn about this. There'd be no justification for the way you've behaved, if all you've fought for can be pitched away to indulge yourself in an adventure. The Bishop would say, and he'd have a right to say that you merely indulged yourself in disobedience out of pique. It would be infinitely better for you to do what the Bishop demands than take this ridiculous way out. Besides, it isn't a priest's place to fight. It really isn't."

"You may be sure that plenty of French priests will fight," Mark said.

"By *force majeure*, not as volunteers. I do implore you not to do anything foolish, Lidderdale. You have too much imagination. The prospect of war has stirred your blood. But the average man will only see in such behaviour the freak of one who is quite irresponsible. All you've stood out for will come in for the same sneer. You needn't think

that we've deserted you. I've been in correspondence with priests all over the diocese, and there is a strong feeling that we ought to ignore the Bishop's Inhibition. Give us time. You'll be offered pulpits all over Cornwall within a short time. Can you honestly say to yourself that you want to go and enlist for any other reason than because you find apparent inactivity in the midst of so much excitement almost intolerable?"

"Well, I think I'll walk into Rosemarket and find out if there's any news."

"You'll only work yourself up into a high fever," Kennedy warned him. "Why not walk over to Polamonter, and have a talk with Goodchild? You'll get the average point of view from him."

Mark did not think that this was bad advice. A really long walk would relieve his pent-up feelings. But the air blowing free across the down sang in his ears of war, the flaming rose of the heather coloured his vision with war, and beyond all the blue sweep of sea round three sides of the peninsula said war, war. He did not feel that on such a day he could stand the stuffy vicarage of Polamonter and Goodchild's discontented family; so turning round he took the wide road back to Rosemarket, where all day he went backward and forward between the post-office and the railway station. It was half-past one in the morning before he reached the Vicarage. He lay awake all night, thinking that England was at war, and asking Divine Guidance for his course.

The first lesson at Mattins was the fifth chapter of *Ecclesiastes*:

*For a dream cometh through the multitude of business;  
and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words.*

*When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it;  
for He hath no pleasure in fools:*

*' Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou  
shouldest vow and not pay.*

"But in a war like this—the justest war that was ever made?" Mark asked himself. "Should I not be paying to God what I have vowed?"

*If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent preventing of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for He that is higher than the highest regardeth.*

"*Sortes sacrae!*" he exclaimed aloud. This was behaving like a fortune-teller, not a priest. The answer could only be found in his own heart. Yet all through Mass his mind was demanding of God the answer.

After Mass he made himself a cup of tea, and set out to Rosemarket to get the latest news of events. There he ran into Miss Horton, who greeted him in a state of considerable excitement.

"It'll be all right, Vicar, it'll be all right."

"What, the Belgian resistance?"

"No, no, my getting a job. I once did a course of nursing, and my very old friend General Bultimeer has most kindly written to say that if I write to Lady Popham he is perfectly sure she will know of something. But he strongly advises me to come up to London. He says he's such a believer in being on the spot. Perhaps you'd like to read his letter? He thinks that everything's quite all right. Where is his letter? Oh dear, I must have left it on the counter of the post-office when I was sending those telegrams. I'm going to-morrow morning. Are you walking back to Nancepean? We might walk back together if you'll wait one moment while I run to the post-office and look for General Bultimeer's letter. Of course I shall hope to get out to the front. That's my idea. I don't want to stay in England. . . ."

Mark agreed to wait while Miss Horton rescued her letter. If she was leaving Nancepean to-morrow it would be too churlish not to give her his company.

"Shall we walk back by the Rose Pool road?" she suggested. "I should like to have a last look at that lovely country. Who knows if I shall ever see it again?"



Even if she were leaving Nancepean to-morrow, Mark thought, he saw no reason why she should be encouraged in this heroic sentimentality.

"Presumably the Great Western Railway will continue to run trains," he said coldly.

"Yes, but one never knows what may happen to one in times of war," Miss Horton sighed.

"One never knows what may happen at any time," Mark pointed out.

"You don't feel, Vicar, that I'm deserting you?"

"Of course not."

"Because you've only to say the word, and I'm ready to stay."

"Why, I wouldn't hear of it, Miss Horton. I think it would be both wrong and foolish of you not to leave to-morrow morning. Your friend the General is right. You should be in London."

Mark was tempted to break his rule of never allowing the conversation between them to become personal. It was all he could do to refrain from trying on Miss Horton the effect of the announcement that he intended to join the army. And suddenly, his imagination projecting itself in a series of pictures of the future, he saw himself lying wounded on a battlefield, losing consciousness, and coming back to it in a quiet airy room with Miss Horton bending over him and asking him how he felt. He shuddered.

"What's the matter? Is your foot hurting you?" she asked in the present.

"There's nothing the matter with my foot."

"You made a face as if you were in pain," she told him.

"Come, come, Miss Horton, you mustn't let your new profession take charge of you entirely."

"Ah no, I shall always be a painter before anything."

Miss Horton made this declaration just as a curve of the steep shady road, down which they had been stumbling through a tunnel of wild cherry-trees, revealed the southerly creek of the Rose Pool, the waters of which beheld thus seemed to be kept in place by a comb of green rushes through

which a few tresses escaped and threaded with silver the level grass in which the road came to an end.

"Why, what's that?" Mark cried, pointing beyond the rushes to a shape that moved slowly through the water. "Surely it can't be a woman bathing?"

"It is a woman," Miss Horton declared. "But she isn't bathing. She's dressed."

Mark ran ahead at top speed, shouting to the woman to go no farther, because the bottom shelved abruptly, and she would be out of her depth before she knew it. But the woman began to move forward faster, so fast that she splashed the glassy surface of the water and ruffled all the bank. Mark did not stay shouting at her, but waded in and seized her arm just as she stepped forward into the subaqueous chasm of the Pool. The shock frightened her sufficiently to let Mark draw her back into the shallows, and thence lead her ashore.

It was Maud Airey, the servant at Pentine, a pale slip of a girl with a vividly red, immobile mouth, and big prominent grey eyes now lustrous with intense emotion. Mark had spoken to her once or twice in Mrs. Pellow's shop; but she had always escaped from his conversation as soon as she could, and he used to suppose that Fred Stithian, her employer, had warned her against the parson.

"Have you taken leave of your senses, Maud, to go paddling like that in the Pool? You've surely heard what a treacherous place it is?"

"I belonged drowning myself," said Maud sullenly.

Here Miss Horton joined them.

"Drowning yourself?" she echoed.

"I been turned out by Mrs. Stithian," Maud explained. "She said if I didn't go quick she'd strip the clothes off of me and turn me out naked. So I went quick, and when you come I belonged drowning myself."

"But does Mr. Stithian allow his wife to behave like this?" Mark asked.

"'Twere what she saw him do with me made her so mad," Maud replied.

"Well, never mind the cause of all this now," Mark said

quickly, for he was finding Miss Horton's excited curiosity more than he could stand. "We must see about getting you home to your people."

"My people? My mother and father do you mean?" Maud asked. "I haven't got no mother nor father. I been to Pentine since Mrs. Stithian took me from the Home. I were found when I were a baby."

"Well, we must see what can be done for you," Mark said. "Meanwhile, you'd better come back with me to the Vicarage. And the quicker we get there the better, for we're both of us pretty well soaked."

Maud had by now lost the animation that her despair had lent her. She accepted with listless, leaden face whatever was suggested. Her eyes dull and heavy-lidded as those of a tortoise stared at nothing. Her red lips signified nothing.

"One moment, Vicar; I really must speak to you for one moment, Vicar," Miss Horton murmured hurriedly. "Wait a minute, Maud. Try to wring some of the water out of your petticoats."

Mark reluctantly followed Miss Horton out of earshot of Maud.

"Vicar, I must implore you not to take this girl back with you. I know Nancepean too well. They will say all sorts of dreadful things. I suspect—I strongly suspect that she is going to have a baby, and though of course nothing can excuse Mrs. Stithian's conduct, at the same time she may have received a good deal of provocation. Let the girl come back to Tintagel for to-night, and I will take her up to town with me to-morrow and get her into a home."

There was no doubt that Miss Horton's advice was good, and probably if Mark had received it from anybody else he would have accepted it, but just because it was Miss Horton's advice he declined to listen to it.

"If it's necessary to get her into a home I will make arrangements. It's very kind of you, Miss Horton, to suggest looking after her; but she is my parishioner and I should prefer to manage this business in my own way."

"But, Vicar, you cannot afford to quarrel with any more people down here."

Miss Horton could not have chosen a more tactless line of argument.

"My dear lady, if you think that I've reached the point of considering whether I can afford to say this or do that in Nancepean you must have completely misunderstood my whole point of view from the beginning."

"I don't know what they'll say in the village when they see us all, and you and Maud Airey soaking wet."

"Say?" Mark repeated. "Say? Good gracious, Miss Horton, do you pay any attention to the grunting of pigs in a sty as you go past?"

Miss Horton glared at Maud with some of the hate that Mrs. Stithian must have felt. Not only was she likely to involve the Vicar more deeply with his hostile parishioners, but she was going to ruin this last walk during which until Maud's arrival on the scene she had never known the Vicar so sweet.

"Damn the girl," Miss Horton almost cried aloud, and tears of mortification stood in her eyes.



## CHAPTER XVII

### CRUELTY

MISS HORTON had not been wrong about Maud's condition, and Mark wrote off at once to Sister Esther to find out if the Community of St. Mary Magdalene could look after her. But before he had time to receive an answer the girl's travail began, brought on prematurely by the events that led up to her attempt to drown herself. Aunt Penelope was bidden to take up her abode at the Vicarage and act as nurse, while Mark hurried in to fetch Dr. Bancroft from Rosemarket. Luckily the business started in the morning, and the road between Nancepean and the Vicarage was dry. Otherwise there might have been trouble with the car. The doctor was a taciturn man, but Mark and he found in birds a subject they could talk about during the drive out. Mark was grateful to the doctor for not showing any signs of inquisitiveness about himself and the difficulties he was having with his parishioners. He had rather dreaded the stock advice he was given on the subject of managing Cornish people.

Maud's little boy, which was born early in the afternoon, seemed remarkably strong and healthy for a seven months' child, although Aunt Penelope did thrust her jaw into Mark's face and vow hoarsely that it were hardly so big as a rabbit.

When Mark went into the drive to see the doctor off, the latter looked at him for a moment before bending down to start up the car:

"She's not one of your servants?"

"No, she was working for one of the farmers in my parish."

The doctor with a grunt swung the handle.

"Well, I hope you won't regret a decent action," he said. "Ever see a lesser spotted woodpecker round here?"

"I did years ago, but not since I came back."

"I saw one while I was driving through Lanbaddern woods last week. Well, I'd pack that girl off as soon as I could if I were you."

"I don't believe you would, Doctor."

"What?"

The doctor was in the car by now and raising his hand in farewell settled down to the problem of the bad road before him.

It was only when he had gone that Mark realized that neither of them had mentioned the war, and that he himself had not bought a paper when he was in Rosemarket. That showed how much of his feverish impulse to enlist had been prompted by a consciousness of the failure of the human side of his activities. The possibility of being able to help Maud Airey was enough to bring home to him the fact that for the present at any rate he had his duties as a priest. *Better is it that thou shouldest not vow than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.*

Mark was not foolish enough to suppose that the entrance of Maud Airey had been designed by Almighty God for the sole reason of answering his prayer for a sign. The answer to his prayer was his own ability to perceive that he had a duty toward his girl instead of blinding himself to that and only perceiving the duty he owed to his country of killing Germans. There were indeed moments when his inactivity seemed scarcely endurable. The atrocities in Belgium were the hardest things to take lying down. And the individual at home could not help feeling that he was taking them in this attitude. The tale of a Belgian child blinded and maimed, who was at this very moment actually in a hospital at Exeter, consumed one with a passionate desire not so much to avenge the deed as to show these bloody Germans that they simply could not be allowed to do such things with impunity. But just when Mark first heard of that mutilated child, the story of Maud Airey's life at Pentine brought him

up against a display of human cruelty much harder to forgive than the outrages of war.

Sister Esther had written to say that the Community would receive Maud Airey at once; but when Mark spoke to the girl herself she expressed the utmost horror of entering any kind of home, not so much on her own account as on the baby's. Her own childhood in a home had seared her memory too deeply with its humiliations and punishments and deliberate abandonment of her to Mrs. Stithian. It was useless for Mark to argue that the kind of home provided by the Community of St. Mary Magdalene would be something far different from what she had experienced. Maud declared that she would rather die than enter such a place.

"I know you can't keep me here, but if you send me away I'll kill myself and my baby before I go there."

Mark consulted Aunt Penelope about Maud's staying in the Vicarage for the present, which he suggested was possible if Aunt Penelope herself would stay there.

"Oh, I see, Mr. Lidderdale would like for me to stay to the Vicarage. Why, yes, I think it could be managed."

Mark was not aware of any criticism in the parish, because by this time he scarcely did more than nod to any of his parishioners, and with Miss Horton's departure a certain amount of knowledge of what people were saying ceased to be unavoidable. He had given up going to Carwithen now, because he had returned to his first impression of Miss Lambourne as a woman whose venom was not less virulent because it was coated in sugar. She in turn had ceased to attend his services. He had wondered several times if he had not been too hasty in believing her insinuations against the loyalty of Mrs. Evans; but every time that his doubt of Miss Lambourne prompted him to make overtures to his earliest friend as Vicar of Nancepean the dread of finding that Mrs. Evans really had believed the vile story about him made him draw back. He really preferred to lose her friendship for ever and be able always to hope that she had not made that particular accusation rather than take the risk of ascertaining that she had. After all, he told himself, Mrs. Evans must know that such things were being said

about him, and if she had felt any genuine goodwill towards him she would have put her pride and her jealousy on one side and gone out of her way to show her own belief in his innocence.

Mark had never intended that Fred Stithian and his wife should escape from all responsibility for the girl they had misused; but when he heard the whole story his feelings were so terribly wrought upon by it that nothing less than a violent and ignominious death seemed to meet the case. He had waited until the child was baptized before he tackled Maud about her own conduct, in doing which, just because he disapproved so strongly of the part in it played by those who should have been the guardians of her purity, he was inclined to be much more severe with Maud than he really felt; it was in trying to propitiate this severity that the girl told the revolting story. Mark was white and shaking with rage when he left the Vicarage and set out to interview Cass Dale with the intention of persuading him to pronounce whatever was the Methodist equivalent of excommunication against Mr. and Mrs. Stithian. He found the minister in a jovial and patronizing mood. The collapse of the rival Sunday-school, the emptiness of the church, and the Ishmaelite existence that was now the lot of a man who at one time had seemed likely to prove a dangerous rival combined to make Cass Dale glow with condescension and charity.

"You keep yourself too much to yourself, Lidderdale. It's not good for a man to live too much within himself. You ought to understand the people here well enough to know that whatever you did you could never drive them into accepting the religion you've tried to force down their throats. You've taken your failure too much to heart. I dare say you've been a little tactless on occasions; but no amount of personal charm would have been strong enough to break down the prejudice against your religion. It's a matter of temperament. The Cornish are temperamentally suited by Wesleyanism. . . ."

"Look here, Cass, I didn't come to discuss the problem of my religious future with you," Mark interrupted. "I've come about this girl, Maud Airey."



"You've got her at the Vicarage, I hear," said Cass.

"She has had her child there."

"I know. That has put up the backs of some of the farmers. But don't think that I'm criticizing you for doing what you did. Not at all. I respect your motives. I don't hesitate to call it a downright good Christian action. And I've told several of them as much pretty forcibly."

"Have you kicked Stithian and his wife out of the chapel yet?" Mark asked.

The minister smiled.

"I've no doubt that's what you'd have done, Lidderdale," he said. "You wouldn't have waited a moment to hear the other side. There are two sides, you know, to everything."

"There is only one side to this," Mark said fiercely. "That wretched girl was treated with diabolical cruelty by the people that took her as a child from a foundlings' home."

Cass Dale looked unconvinced.

"You must remember that I know the girl," he said. "And I should be inclined to say that she was untruthful, not perhaps deliberately untruthful, but hysterically. A little mad, if you like."

"Well, if she is," Mark exclaimed, "that alone is enough to condemn the Stithians, for I don't suppose that the male rascal has had the impudence to deny that he is the father of the child. His wife's behaviour proves that he was."

"Oh, but he does deny it," said Cass. "And his wife says that she turned the girl out of the house partly because she accused her husband wrongfully and partly because she saw with her own eyes that Maud was trying to lead him on."

In his exasperation Mark could have broken up the hideous little parlour of Gilead where this discussion was being held.

"They're a pair of liars," he exclaimed. "I tell you I've had the whole story of her life at Pentine from the girl's own lips. It's nauseating. It's too horrible to repeat in detail. There are some things that one simply cannot repeat, and the details of cruelty, of lustful cruelty, cannot be repeated. If I did, I should feel that I was in some way

sharing in it. The mere words that are used to describe certain actions almost become actions themselves."

"But if, as I suspect, the girl is an hysterical subject," the minister argued, "she is easily capable of inventing—or, rather, of imagining . . ."

"Imagining!" Mark burst in. "You can't be taken away from a foundlings' home at the age of twelve and spend the next six years of your life on a lonely farm and imagine the things she told me."

"Well, what were they?"

"I tell you I can't repeat them. You've no right to ask me to. I give you my word that Fred Stithian and his wife are not fit even to enter your Chapel, while as for allowing him to get up and preach there, it's blasphemy against the Holy Ghost."

"Of course, if I were convinced that he was as bad as you say he is he wouldn't be allowed to preach. But it's impossible to accept the word of a notoriously hysterical girl against a man like Stithian when he's supported by his wife."

"In other words," Mark said contemptuously, "you're afraid to," with which taunt he left Gilead.

On his way up to Pentine, for if Cass dared not tackle Fred Stithian he must tackle the brute himself, he met Arthur Tangye.

"Why, Arthur," he said, "are you working here?"

"Only gleaning for my mother."

Mark was on the point of telling Arthur that he would be better occupied elsewhere, when he thought how unwarranted such interference would seem nowadays.

"Have you enjoyed yourself this summer?"

"Not so much," Arthur replied, looking down.

Mark hurried on, for he felt that if he stayed talking to Arthur he should forget his wrath against the Stithians in his own sorrow for happier days in Nancepean.

Pentine was protected on the seaward side by a small grove of evergreen oaks, but even so it was the bleakest and most windswept farm in the neighbourhood. Not a flower grew in its garden; and not merely the town-place, but even

the land immediately round was given up to a number of scraggy tortoiseshell pigs. The house itself, bare of any greenery, looked savage enough even for the tale of horror of which it had been the scene, and the thought of how that miserable child must have regarded it shuddered across Mark's imagination. He could scarcely bring himself to enter for dread of the vividness with which those events would be reconjured when he saw the very furniture and the hangings and the wallpaper that were the mute witnesses of what had been done. A nausea overtook him, but he fought it off and crashed upon the door with his stick. A dog barked behind the house, and a boy of about fifteen, a red-faced loutish lad with a strong likeness to his father, came round the corner and gaped at the visitor. The thought that this accursed imp had often been the cause of those infernal thrashings was too much for Mark. In an uncontrollable impulse he picked up one of the round stones that bordered the path and flung it at the creature, whose shin it struck with such force that he ran blubbering and howling to the back of the house.

At the same moment the front door was opened by Mrs. Stithian herself, a tall, thin-lipped woman with eyes like granite pebbles in a marine pool.

"Where's your husband?" Mark demanded harshly.

"That's no way to ask for anyone," she replied.

"Don't stand there arguing with me. Go and find him."

"I'll do no such a thing," said Mrs. Stithian, folding her arms.

At this moment the loutish boy came blubbering up behind his mother with the tale of what Parson had done to him.

"Don't let the little brute stand boo-hooing there," said Mark. "Send him to find your husband."

"I'll have you to the police-court for this," she threatened.

"Don't talk about police-courts, woman," said Mark. "You'll have your fill of police-courts before I've done with you."

"Go and fetch your father, Charlie," she told her son.

"Go and tell him that the parson is here, drunk or mad."

"Where's he to?" the boy sobbed.

"Go and find him. How do I know where he's to?"

However, the farmer himself appeared on the scene as she spoke and coloured up deeply when he saw who the visitor was.

"Stithian," Mark said, "I'm not going to waste time talking to you. I've come here to thrash you."

"Charlie," Mrs. Stithian screamed. "Run and loose Carver. Fred, where's your gun to?"

"Charlie," the farmer shouted, "you stay where you're to, my son. I don't want no dogs and no guns neither. So you've come here to thrash me, have you, parson?" he said, turning to Mark with a coarse guffaw.

"For the way you and your wife and that boy of yours treated that child you vowed to protect. I can't very well thrash your wife, because if I did she'd get the sympathy of fools. But don't think, Mrs. Stithian, that I keep my hands from you for any other reason."

"You're a fine one, aren't you, to talk so high," the farmer sneered. "You're a fine one to talk about wrongs done to children. . . ."

This was just the cap that Mark wanted to explode the energy of his rage. It saved all that rolling up of sleeves and announcing what he was going to do. He swung his stick and caught the farmer such a thwack on his fat buttocks that he roared with pain and, lowering his head, charged for his antagonist like a bull. Mark stood aside and caught him again on the same spot harder than before, dropped the stick, and when the farmer turned drove his fist with all his might into his jaw. The blow was a knock-out. Stithian lay motionless in the mud of his yard; and Mark, hardly able to keep his feet from kicking the gross red face out of human shape, turned and left Pentine.

Yet by the time that he had reached the high road there was no sense of satisfaction in what he had done.

*If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and the violent preventing of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter; for He That is higher than the highest regardeth.*



Yes, but did He? Or was that kind of explanation merely the desperate subterfuge of defeated theologians? Was anything supreme over circumstance? And was not all good and all evil determined by its fortuitous concatenations?

## CHAPTER XVIII

### A CHRISTMAS LETTER

The Vicarage,  
Nancepean,  
South Cornwall,  
December 22nd, 1914.

My dear Rector,

I'm sorry that I've been such a bad correspondent all these last months, but I've been in such an unsettled condition, changing my opinions and plans from one day to another, that I've felt that any letter would no longer be a letter from me by the time it reached Oxfordshire. I don't believe that I've sent you more than an occasional postcard to let you know that I was still alive since the Bishop inhibited me. Or did I even write and tell you that he had inhibited me? Perhaps I should have obeyed him if by the time he had taken action I had still had any congregation left. But as by that time chiefly for reasons quite unconnected with my ecclesiastical behaviour I had nobody left I could not see my way to surrender ceremonies and services and teaching which I believe I am entitled to have and to hold and to preach. If for instance I had given way over Reservation, what was left to me? The church was already empty of men and women. If it had been empty of God as well, what was I doing in Nancepean? A woodlouse creeping over the lid of the font would have been as useful as I was. I have not only refused to surrender anything, but I have added to my ecclesiastical crimes in half a hope that the Bishop will finally take legal proceedings to deprive me of the living. If he does I shall have done some service to the movement because it will make me look like a martyr. Of course, I shall not be a martyr. I mean so far as any spiritual advantage

to myself is concerned. But so many people will say that I am that there will be plenty of others who will believe them and derive great spiritual advantage from the whole futile business. I'm not writing cynically. I do really believe that the only way to redeem a very little of my failure will be to get myself flung neck and crop out of the living.

When war was first declared I wanted to enlist, but I never could quite see my enlisting other than as a would-be beau geste to escape from an intolerable position. If I could have gone right off on the day war was declared and found a recruiting officer I might have avoided this feeling, because the consciousness that I had only one motive in enlisting, which was to put the Germans in their place by proving to them that they were not the equal of Englishmen, would have justified my action to myself. But within a week of the outbreak of war too many other motives were added to that first spontaneous impulse to chastise Germans. There was the feeling that people expected one to join up. This, of course, wasn't true of parsons, but as a parson one had the feeling of uselessness and a sense of people's asking each other why at such a critical moment in the life of the nation useless creatures like parsons should be allowed to exist. I knew that at the back of my mind I was despising my profession when I found myself admiring Drumgold, and actually going up to his house and watching him stick flags in a map with an air of authority. Hero-worship with Drumgold as the hero showed that I was already touched by the rapidly spreading hysteria of the time. Then there was the feeling of being out of it all; this, of course, was only another aspect of discontent with my profession. Youth seemed to be slipping away from my grasp. Thirty-three seemed a great age, and like a woman who perceives the shadow of spinsterhood it seemed to me imperative to make a last desperate clutch at life. Of course, this undignified state of mind soon passed, and one was left wondering if people would not think it ridiculous for a parson of thirty-three to suppose that he was capable of being any conceivable use as a combatant. So far my doubts and hesitations were all due to looking at myself from different

angles. Presently I began to give up looking at myself, and took to looking at the war. I began to grow tired of the superlatives that were being applied to it, tired of reading that it was going to change humanity, tired of hearing that it was a war to end war, and that it was a war in defence of small nations, for it seemed to me that however long it lasted it would be no more in eternity than the twinkle of a star in infinity. I began to be tired of the complacency with which people were settling down to be swallowed up in a mundane catastrophe merely because it was the biggest catastrophe on record, and then as much more violently exasperated by the behaviour of people on whom a realization that the Germans might win was slowly dawning. The Germans were worse, because in their case both the troops and the non-combatants got into a panic; in our case it was only the people at home that got frightened. Of course, they're beginning to recover from it now; but all that despicable white feather business was pretty awful. Then came the Bishop's paternal permission to join the forces if his sons in God could square their own consciences in the matter. It looks when put down on paper like mere contrariness, but I know that I was so much disgusted by the episcopal letter that I simply couldn't avail myself of the permission and abandon Nancepean. I think what I felt, and still feel, was that the Bishop in making this announcement did it solely out of an idea that it was good form, from a desire to be well seen by the right people. I am not yet quite sure if I am what is called a pacifist. I think it's clear that our Lord looked beyond wars to peace, but I don't think that it's so clear as it seems superficially that He meant non-resistance to apply to nations as well as individuals. Of course, if every individual practised non-resistance, all nations would equally do so in consequence; but until nations are made up of non-resisting individuals it seems to me that it would be wrong to allow one nation to override the rest. You're really putting a premium upon force by doing so, and by surrendering all power into the hands of the nation that practises force you would be postponing peace for ever unless you were to have faith in Almighty God's sudden



pouring forth of His grace into the souls of the victorious nation. But would He do that? It looks almost blasphemous to ask such a question, but it seems to me that Almighty God never has worked through the greater to the less. Do you know any instance in history of a sudden and complete change of heart in a nation? Anything comparable, for instance, to the countless instances we have of the conversion of the individual? I confess I don't. Besides, non-resistance by England to German aggression would not have been due to any Christian motive. The case was given away by the Radical paper which practically counselled us not to fight because we should gain far more by keeping quiet. That could never be a motive for not fighting.

At the same time, I think it is high time that parsons began to talk about the spirit in which war ought to be waged. Merely to add fuel to the now almost universal bonfire of hate is a denial and degradation of Christianity. They have no business to stay at home and do this. If their hate and fear of the Germans is too strong for them, they ought to go and fight. The emotion of hate demands practical expression, by which I mean physical expression. Abstract hate is as contemptible as abstract love. We must pray much harder, and when we preach, which at such a time should be as seldom as possible, we must preach decency. We are such a decent nation, we English, so much the most civilized masculine nation, that it really would be a mundane catastrophe if the war succeeded in turning us into Germans. I don't think it will, because our sense of proportion is so quickly restored. We never really let ourselves be ruled for long by politicians or generals or priests or doctors or even by the press. By the way, I think we blame the press too much for the corruption of public decency. It seems to me that the press is merely the great cloaca maxima of national opinion. It makes a stench and gets clogged sometimes so that sewer gas is exhaled, but how much worse it would be if we had no drainage system at all. People will talk as if our unpleasant habits were the result of the press instead of the press being the result of our necessities. What is the matter with our press at the moment is that

the cloaca maxima has been stopped up by the military authorities, with the result that they've only themselves to thank if the country is being poisoned by sewer gas. Well, that's enough about the war. We're in no condition at present to discuss the rights and wrongs of it. All I hope is that what has started as a snowball won't end as an avalanche. I was talking to a fellow back slightly wounded from the front about when it's going to be over. He says on apparently good authority that French gives it till April, but that Grey says May. How much longer than any of us thought when it began!

I had a sharp lesson a little time ago on the fruitlessness of revenge. In fact, I think that some of my rage against the Germans was worked off, and that I am seeing the absolute necessity of waging war in the right spirit just because of that lesson. A local farmer and his wife took a girl from a home for foundlings about six years ago. The man is a pillar of the chapel, the woman respectability incarnate. He is a gross sensual bully, she thin-lipped, cold-hearted, but as sensual in her own way as her husband. In all the historic cruelty cases the woman has invariably been the leader, and in several of them the man has escaped punishment, because he was supposed either not to have known what his wife was doing, or to have been too indolent to interfere. Personally I should say that in most cases his had been the pleasure of a corrupt audience. In this case the woman took a delight in exposing the girl to every kind of sickening humiliation combined with actual violence. One of her—no, it can't be written about. Her torture of the girl did not cease as she grew older, and the end of it was that the girl at the age of seventeen was seduced by the husband. Seduced is scarcely the word to use, for she was never allowed to have any self-respect to be led away from. Even the eldest boy about three years younger than herself was allowed to assist in the degradation of her personality. The girl became pregnant, and when she was seven months gone, the woman turned her out of the house with such ferocity that the wretched victim tried to drown herself. I can scarcely believe that this was done in a fit

of jealousy, which is what the girl thinks. I should fancy rather that it was done as a kind of demonstration of the husband's respectability. Anyway, it's not worth while speculating about her motives. I took the girl in at the Vicarage with the intention of sending her to St. Mary Magdalene's, and indeed did write about her to Esther. Unfortunately the shock brought on a premature travail, and she was delivered of a boy in the Vicarage. I was so much horrified by the girl's story that when I could not get any assurances from the Wesleyan minister that he would excommunicate the farmer and his wife I rushed off in a rage and thrashed the man. Now I wish I hadn't, because by doing so I seem in some way to have put myself on his level. By doing what I did (incidentally I pitched a large stone at the little fiend of a boy and only just kept myself from thrashing the woman!) I've practically made it impossible to obtain any reparation. Before my action it would have been difficult enough to obtain a conviction from a Cornish jury, but now it would be impossible, because my own name would be blackened so successfully that I should become the culprit instead of the real culprits. However, it has given me something to do to look after the girl, and the baby is a great delight to me. It's rather a tax on my purse, and I've had to sell some of my books to provide necessities for the two of them. But it's tremendously well worth it. In fact, just this one baby has given me something to work for again. My thwarted paternal instincts are blossoming freely. Don't forget that one baby, when your whole congregation consists of four adults and two children, adds greatly to your importance. The mother is difficult. I'm almost afraid to give her much religion. She has been so starved emotionally that it's like feeding a starving creature too generously at first. What a ghastly thought it is that homes for foundlings have nearly always been the product of genuine charity, and yet that they have nearly always made life a hell for those they were intended to succour. Imagine calling a wretched child Maud Airey because she was found in an area. It's devilish, isn't it?

My great antagonist Major Drumgold became quite

friendly with me over the war, and instead of spending his time writing to the Bishop about my ecclesiastical excesses devoted all his energy to discovering concrete gun-platforms and Germans of high rank in secluded cliff bungalows. Signalling to the enemy was incessant throughout the peninsula. In the end the authorities grew so tired of his activity that they gave him the command of a skeleton regiment, the umpteenth D.C.L.I. He's training them at the other end of the Duchy. I'm sorry to say that only one lad from Nancepean has enlisted, not because I want them to go, but because poor Drumgold counted on a feudal levy, and even the one that did join up thought the Garrison Artillery a safer billet.

Mortemer has kindly tried to cheer our Christmas by sending me a wonderful set of figures for the Crib, and all of us, Aunt Penelope, Jennifer, Albert (who has been a trump all through my bad times), Dick, Lily, Maud Airey and the baby who has been christened David are going to spend to-morrow in arranging the church.

Love to you all and thoughts of old Christmas Days in happier years.

Yours ever,  
M. L.



## CHAPTER XIX

### THE CRIB

THE morning of the vigil of Christmas was spent by Mark and his dependents in arranging the Crib, for which his old vicar had presented him with the most complete set of figures that could be procured. When he saw the splendid ox and ass, he had a sharp pang of regret that he had never been able to set up a Crib like this in the days when there would have been the children to enjoy it. There really was something futile about this elaborate representation for the Prawles and Maud Airey. Even Miss Horton's presence would have been welcome. What a Christmas-tide! Hate all round him here in Nancepean! Hate all over the world. . . .

They finished decorating the church just before the shutting in of a still and humid dusk. When Mark found that nobody had thought of bringing a lantern he sent the whole family home, for as the moon would not rise till late, and as they would all be coming down for midnight Mass, he thought that he would say the first vespers of Christmas by himself.

A fathomless depression of spirit came over the Vicar when he found himself alone. He sat for a while watching the last glimmer of twilight fade from the windows, too listless even to light a candle and begin the Office. Albert had forgotten to trim the sanctuary lamp, and the darkness over the tabernacle seemed to deprive him even of the Presence upon the altar. He tried to pray for his country, but it seemed an absurd impertinence. He tried to pray for his parish, but it seemed a waste of time. He tried to pray for his dependents, but it seemed a piece of insincerity. Last of all, he tried to pray for himself, and that was the greatest failure of the lot.

What a pity that there would be no children to enjoy the Crib! It had been generous and considerate of dear Mortemer to spend so much money and take so much trouble over his present, but really it had been wasted on Nancepean. He ought to have equipped some church with a large congregation that would have appreciated what he had done for them. Yes, what a pity about the children! Had he not been too hasty, perhaps, in breaking up the Sunday-school like that? Had he not really thought more of himself than of the children in the way he had behaved? Might not that hasty surrender have given a clear run to the vile tales set afoot by his enemies? Probably all sorts of slanders were being whispered now about Maud Airey and himself. He should soon be getting an anonymous letter accusing him of being the father of her child. But that kind of scandal hurt nobody. Perhaps not; but the other accusation had been infinitely more vile than the vilest things they could whisper about Maud and him. He had known when he took the girl in at the Vicarage that he was inviting the parish to gossip. In a way, by a cynical standard, they were justified in gossiping. But over the children . . . no, he simply could not have gone on with the school as if he were unconscious of the calumny. If he were to be given his first year as Vicar over again, he should not behave otherwise than he had behaved over the school. However, it was unprofitable to sit here like this on Christmas Eve brooding in a dark church. He rose and lighted the candles for Vespers. The saying of the Office did not give pleasure to his mind or bring peace to his soul. He was glad when he had finished. But he really must try to cheer up, so that the Christmas Eve party at the Vicarage would seem enjoyable to the others, whatever he was feeling himself. Before leaving the church he took a last glance at the arrangement of the Crib. No doubt it would look better when it was all lighted up; but by the flickering of his solitary candle the figures appeared dead and meaningless, like dolls in the window of a toyshop shut up for the night. What a pity Arthur and Susie and Donald and Maggie would not be at the party? What a pity!

Outside in the churchyard Mark listened for a while in

the darkness. Once he thought he heard gunfire at sea, but it was the waves thundering on the beaches deep in the caves on the other side of the Castle cliff. The night was as black a night as he had ever known. He was glad that he had sent the others home, for the road back through the valley was not going to be by any means easy walking. Indeed, it turned out worse even than Mark had anticipated, and there were moments when he felt stifled by the darkness to such a point that he wanted to sit down in the path and yield to it rather than go stumbling on his way dazed as if by excess of light. However, he persevered. As a matter of fact the struggle did him good, for he was so glad to reach the Vicarage gate and see the shine of lamps that he was able to be quite friendly and jolly with them all when he arrived indoors.

Gradually, however, as the evening wore on Mark felt himself once more falling a prey to that dreadful depression which had overtaken him in the church. He would start some round game and forget what he had to do when it came to his turn. He found himself wondering if Albert had bought himself that white waistcoat out of the church funds. Since Drumgold went away Albert had had whatever money there was in his keeping.

"Have you heard who they want for people's warden, Albert? I don't suppose Major Drumgold will offer himself for election next Easter."

"No, I haven't heard nothing," Albert answered, and the little man looked as wise and important as he could, for a question like this gave him a sense of holding high office.

"Toby," said Aunt Penelope, shaking her fist at her eldest nephew, "put that filthy old pipe in your pocket. I'm ashamed for 'ee. I'll leave 'ee to my house next time Vicar invites 'ee to a party if you can't behave more fitty. You belong to be a proper old noosance. A hog wouldn't smoke a dirty old pipe like you belong."

"Oh, that reminds me," Mark said. "I bought some cigars in Rosemarket for Albert and Toby. Where did I put them? Oh, yes, and a bottle of whisky. Where's the whisky, Aunt Penelope?"

It was found at last, and a solemn drinking of goodwill

took place, in which Mark forgot to join, but went and sat down in his armchair by the fire.

"Ten o'clock," he said presently. "You'd better go and get your supper now. We'll start for church at half-past eleven sharp. Have the lanterns all lighted ready, so that we aren't kept waiting at the last minute."

"Isn't Mr. Lidderdale going to have any supper, then?" Aunt Penelope asked.

"I'll have an egg and two or three pieces of toast in here."

Aunt Penelope threw up her eyes to Heaven and hustled everybody out of the study into the kitchen. When Maud brought Mark his supper, she waited uncertainly by the table as if she wanted to say something.

"I don't want anything more, child," Mark told her.

"Are you cross with me about something I've done, Mr. Lidderdale?" she asked, fixing him with her big grey eyes.

"Of course not. Why should I be cross with you?"

"I've thought more than once lately that you'd be glad to be rid of me and the lill baby. I do know he's been crying terrible all this last week or two. But he's been feeling a bit slight."

Mark shook his head with a smile.

"Don't worry about the baby, dear child. I'm glad to have the little thing. Why, he's the most important member of my small flock. No, I'm just not feeling very well, Maud. Don't worry yourself, but enjoy your Christmas like a sensible young woman."

"Your egg will be cold if you don't eat it soon."

Mark got up and sat down to the meagre supper on the little round table. It was as difficult to crack that egg as if it were a pebble from the beach.

"Mr. Lidderdale," Maud began screwing her apron round and round in her nervousness over what she was trying to say.

"Well?"

"Mr. Lidderdale, I'll never forget what you've done for me. And it makes I mad when Baby do cry so fierce. But you won't ever turn against him?"



"No, no, Maud. I tell you I love your little boy."

She hesitated a moment or two longer, and then suddenly blurted out:

"You wouldn't grudge it him if you had to buy him his milk? Because I can't feed him no more myself. Mrs. Prawle said she'd ask you about it; but she hasn't said nothing, and I thought perhaps you was vexed when you found you was paying for his food."

"Not at all, child. Please don't worry your head about such foolishness. Now run away, for I want to keep quiet till we go down to Mass."

The baby's food would not add much, but all the same, Mark thought, the financial position was getting rather difficult. Oh dear, he really must shake off this gloom, and the problems of money were not going to help him do that.

When the time came to start for church, Mark made a tremendous effort to put himself in tune with the spirit of the great Christian occasion. But Aunt Penelope's lantern did not seem to go before them to Church Cove as the star went before the wise men to Bethlehem, and he could not help thinking that for all of them the pilgrimage was a duty to be performed out of compliment to himself and not at all because their souls thirsted to bow down in worship before the Holy Child.

"I suppose somebody will be informing the military authorities of signals seen toward midnight on Christmas Eve," Mark thought. "What time does the moon rise, Albert?" he added aloud.

Albert shook his head in perplexity. He could as easily have given the date and time of the Last Trump.

However, the gloom and depression of this walk was nothing to the horror that succeeded when the candles were lit in the church; for, while Mark had been laboriously trying to celebrate the mirth of Christmas at the Vicarage, his enemies had descended in the darkness and made of the Crib an obscene caricature. They had chosen the figure of St. Joseph to represent Mark himself. The garments had been tarred and the face whitewashed, and Mark's biretta

had been cocked on one side of its head. Round the neck was hung a placard on which was printed in sprawling letters:

NOW MAUD LOOK AFTER OUR BABY CAREFULLY AND DON'T  
CARRY ON YOUR GAMES WITH TOBY PRAWLE WHEN I'M NOT  
LOOKING.

The figure of the Blessed Virgin was dressed up in woman's clothes. What was written on the placard round her neck cannot be recorded without wounding too deeply the feelings of Christian souls.

Suddenly Maud cried out in terror:

"They're my clothes! They're my clothes, the clothes I wore when I was to Pentine!"

She screamed loudly and hugged the baby to her breast.

"Look—see what they've done to the baby Jesus!" she cried. "Oh, lev me take my baby away out of here. Lev me take my lill baby away."

She turned to run out of the church, but Mark bade Albert stand by the door, for he feared what she might not do in her distraught state. The image of the Holy Child had been smashed to pieces with a hammer. A barrowful of farm-yard dung had been flung over the adoring shepherds. An empty beer-bottle was swinging above the stable in place of the star.

Aunt Penelope became voluble on the subject of the defilement and destruction until Mark checked her. But as he moved toward the sacristy to vest himself for Mass, she burst forth again and he heard her say:

"If I was Passon, I wouldn't have no service. No, I wouldn't. Not a word would I say. No, I wouldn't. I'd turn right around and go back home to bed before I'd have one word of a service. I'd soon show 'em if I wasn't going to be treated proper. I wouldn't have no old services."

"Penelope," Mark called sternly from the sacristy door, "didn't I tell you to hold your tongue?"

Yet when he began Mass he found himself thinking that Penelope had voiced his own feelings, and it was all he could do to continue. He did not reserve the Blessed Sacrament as

usual, because the notion of leaving the Presence confronted all through the night of Christmas by that obscene and sacrilegious pantomime was too horrible.

The moon was up when they came out of church, and Mark bade the others go ahead of him, for he did not want to hear their comments on the outrage, nor their guesses at the authorship of it. He did not feel that he could pray to-night in the desecrated church, but when he tried to pray outside he found that he could not pray there, and soon he followed the lanterns bobbing along the road toward the Vicarage.

When he reached home, Penelope told him that Maud had gone to bed immediately.

"She was terrible vexed, Mr. Lidderdale. Well, 't isn't nice to see such things wrote about you and put up for all to see. I don't care who hears me say it, but it were a nasty, mean, spiteful trick to play anyone. I took off the cards what was wrote on, Mr. Lidderdale. What would 'ee like for me to do with 'em?"

"Burn them, burn them, Penelope."

"I thought perhaps you might like for to take and show them to the police."

"The fewer people that see them, Penelope, the better. Go and burn them at once."

Mark was sorry that he had not spoken to Maud for a moment before she went to bed. He would have liked to say a few words to console the poor child. What fiends men could be—what fiends!

It was dark and miserable when Mark walked down to say Mass on Christmas morning. He had told Albert not to come and serve him, but to rest quietly at home until the eleven o'clock Mass. He wanted to clear up the wreckage of the Crib himself so that by midday when they all came to church the scene of the night before would be like a bad dream. He wanted also to make reparation for his own lack of faith last night by offering the Mass in perfect submission to the will of God. He averted his eyes from the Crib when he entered the church, because he was afraid of his own weak-

ness and did not wish his mind to be so tormented as to be incapable of meditating upon the Incarnation.

Mark felt happier after Mass, and with a prayer for Divine help when once more he had to face the horror of the Crib, he turned to fulfil his task. When he was half-way along the nave, he was startled to hear the sound of an infant's wailing coming from the direction he was going. He wondered for a moment if the shock of the sacrilege had deprived him of his senses. Then for a moment he asked himself breathlessly if Almighty God had deigned to work a miracle in this church for the healing of his heart and the consolation of his soul. Was this the prelude to such a favour as had been granted to St. Anthony of Padua?

It was indeed a living creature that lay there weeping on the straw, but it was not the Divine Babe of Bethlehem. It was Maud Airey's baby lying where last night had lain the figure of the Holy Child. Mark knelt down to try to hush the infant's cries and found a letter by his side in the straw.

Dere Mr. Liderdale please forgiv me for wat ime doing To make your troubles wurse than wat they was befor but i cannot bare it no more i Feel you must hate me after Last Nihgt and that is more than i can bare to think They will not leeve me in piece to the vilage but when i pars by they lauf and poke there fingers at me but i never told you about this becos i did not want to make you more angry but when they took my cloths like that and dresed up the vurgin mary in my cloths i saw in your face that you coud not bare it no more and when i saw how they had broke up the baby Jesus Crist i thort they would brake up my baby next so that is hwy i hav not took him with me were i am going please do not think i am going to kil or dround myself becos i am not becos i would not do that but please look after my baby kindly that is hwy i have put him were the baby Jesus Crist was so that you woud not be vext but take him and look after him he will not be a grate expence jest now and Mrs. Prawl do now wat food he rekwires it do not cost verry much please do not make a surch for me please do not becos if i coud not go away like this i woud dround myself so as not to be a trubble to you dere Mister Liderdale becos you have been so



kind i cannot thank you in the way i woud like but i hav been all the nihgt riting this Leter and i canot say the wurds i woud like to say but i Feel them all the same i have not had a verry hapy time in my life and i woud not like to put my baby to a home for por childrin becos he woud be unhapy like i was and perraps be beeton tho he coud not have a baby thank god like his muther i hop you will forgiv me for wat ive done puting my baby to the chursh like this and pleese pleese do not make a surch for me that is all i arsk and pray and pleese do not think i will be bad because I wont only just go away and take survis somewere to a place were they canot lauf at me and say you was doing wat they rote on the vurgin mary i hop you will have a mery crismus and a hapy new yere with fondest love to all from

yours Sinserey  
Maud.

Mark wondered what he ought to do. Maud had probably walked into Rosemarket in the darkness; but it should be easy enough to overtake her if he set out after her at once. She had no friends, no money, scarcely any clothes. He looked at the image of the Blessed Virgin and saw that she had taken the clothes with which her persecutors had decked it. That looked as if she meant what she said in the letter about not drowning herself. Perhaps the greatest kindness he could do the poor girl was to let her vanish like this from Nancepean for ever. If he caused a search to be made she probably would take her life. Meanwhile, the first thing to do was to take the baby to the Vicarage. It could not be good for a child to be left all this time in a cold church. Mark picked up the wailing infant and hurried back with it along the valley. On his way he made up his mind to send Albert after Maud with money for her to go to London and a telegram to have her met at Paddington by somebody. Not Miss Horton, because she would remind her too much of Nancepean. If he telegraphed to Mortemer, he would send somebody from St. Cyprian's. That would be better than telegraphing to St. Mary Magdalene's on Christmas Day.

Mark did not wait to explain matters to Aunt Penelope,

but hurried down to the Prawles' cottage and roused Albert, who took Toby with him to help in the search for Maud. However, at dusk they came up to the Vicarage to say that they had been unable to hear news of the girl anywhere. The next day Mark went down to Penzance, hearing at Rosemarket Station that a young woman like Maud had taken a ticket there early that morning; but there was no sign of her in Penzance, and supposing that she had somehow found a refuge, he gave up the search.

## CHAPTER XX

### VISITATION

**A**FTER this disastrous Christmas Mark made an effort to be reconciled with his former friends; but the effort came too late. What might have been accepted earlier as a manifestation of genuine goodwill was now considered a weak and cowardly attempt to curry favour with his parish because he was afraid of the consequences of his obstinacy. He put up with several rebuffs and still persevered; but one January day of east wind he called at the Hanover Inn and found Mrs. Evans coldly hostile. He reproached her with deserting him at a time when he most needed her support.

"I don't know how ever you can say such things, Mr. Lidderdale," she exclaimed. "'Twas you that flung back in our faces whatever we belonged to say and whatever we belonged to do to help you. I wouldn't have listened to what no one said against you; but if somebody just shuts themselves away and says not a word, what's all the world going to think?"

"I see," said Mark. "You think that silence is a sign of guilt?"

"I do think that anyone with a clear conscience would surely come out into the open and not hide themselves away."

"Well, what do you think about me, Mrs. Evans? Do you think that I'm the father of Maud Airey's child? Do you think that I've murdered the wretched girl? I hear that is the latest tit-bit of foul gossip. Do you think that I was living in sin with Miss Horton? Do you think . . ." He paused. "If you believe these tales you believe them because you have allowed your judgment and your sense of decency to be corrupted by this vile jealousy which has poisoned my existence here. So long as I was content to let

myself be your private property I could do nothing wrong. The moment I allowed some of my other parishioners to see something of me all your goodwill turned to malice."

"'Tis well you should twist all things to suit yourself, Mr. Lidderdale," she said bitterly.

"I've twisted nothing," Mark replied. "It's your distorted mind that sees things all twisted. Oh, well, there's nothing more to say. I'm sorry I've missed Donald. I thought he'd be home this afternoon."

"He only went out when he saw you come in," Mrs. Evans said cruelly.

Mark flinched. Without another word he left the Hanover Inn, quite clearly convinced that it was idle to struggle any longer against the prejudice of Nancepean.

All through that Spring he lived more and more within himself, with nothing to break the monotony except the illness of David the baby, who died early in April. Nothing had been heard of his mother since Christmas morning; and Mark had given up scanning the columns of the *Western Morning News* for the report of an unknown woman found drowned. The poor little baby had been so ill practically ever since his mother went away that Mark could not but be glad that the short life was finished. Moreover, the child would presently have become a serious problem, with the cost of living rising and the uncertainty of his guardian's future. The death of the baby set free Aunt Penelope to return to her own cottage, and Mark was back in his old nocturnal solitude, although his existence was now not much more of a solitude by night than it was by day.

In such circumstances it was not surprising that Mark should brood a great deal on the war. Everybody eats more rapidly when he is alone, and what is true of eating is true of thinking. Paradox though at first it may sound, time passes more swiftly in solitude. When to this general speeding up of Mark's inner life was added the detachment of opinions formed in solitude, it was natural that he should presently find himself ahead of the current point of view at home about the war. Partly, of course, his inclination



already to regard the outbreak of the war as a folly and the continuation of it as a crime was due to the foxy human mind's calling sour the grapes of a thwarted ambition; but whereas thwarted ambitions console themselves by this evasion, thwarted emotions, if they cannot express themselves directly, do so indirectly. Mark denied any gratification of his paternal instincts either as man or priest enlarged his affection for the children of Nancepean to an immense compassion for the suffering populations of Europe.

The war must stop; and the only way that this cessation could be achieved was by tending the dying glimmer of peace in the hearts of men and women. When during the summer visitors came occasionally to his church, Mark always preached the gospel of love from his pulpit; but unfortunately such a gospel was at that time unpatriotic, because any action or any word that seemed likely to foster anything but hate for the enemy was considered to prejudice recruiting. It was a strange delusion of the military authorities that a year after the outbreak of war men could still be persuaded to enlist by inducing them to hate the enemy.

Mark's sermons were very mild, but they soon earned him the reputation of being a pro-German. At this period the stay-at-home population faced by the noble deeds of those who were fighting their battles for them suffered acutely from a sense of inferiority which turned every other person into a liar. Unlike the ambassador of the apophthegm they lied at home for their country. Anybody who was not clever enough to lie for his country believed from an equally unimpeachable motive of patriotism the lies told him. The combination of lying and credulity turned life into a dream, and a very bad dream too.

The people of Nancepean were experts in inventing fictions about the morality of their neighbours, but they were poor hands at warlike fictions. However, they made up for it by patriotic credulity, and when the visitors who heard Mark's sermons started a new swarm of rumours the *gobe-mouche* parishioners swallowed them eagerly. Mark was a pro-German! His very name had something Germanic about it. The

Pope was a pro-German: Mark was addicted to ritualistic services. One or two visitors wondered if the fellow wasn't actually a German spy. And that so-called altar? It was uncommonly like a concrete gun-platform. All that business too with candles in a church by the edge of the sea. It made one suspect him of signalling to submarines. Why did he always keep that tower so carefully locked? Benzine? What more suitable place to supply a submarine with benzine? He was always walking about by himself too. That in itself was suspicious. Several visitors wrote to the War Office about him, and Mark became a suspect in a card-index. In fact, he became two suspects, because his name was spelt in one denunciation with a single "d" and in another with two "d's." Another visitor wrote to the Admiralty about him, and he became a third suspect, because the Admiralty suspects were not communicated to the War Office for fear the War Office should collect more suspects than the sum total of the civil population, in which case the war would come to an end, which would be a really serious blunder. In the end a highly specialized branch of the Secret Service, which proceeding from the War Office, the Admiralty and the Foreign Office partook of the nature of each, but which only endured by playing off any two of its authors against the third, secured him for its list of suspects by swapping a duplicate suspect against him with the War Office. Inquiries were set on foot. Mark's letters were specially recommended to the Censor, who discovered that he was in the habit of asking when this infernal war was going to end, and of making various derogatory remarks about members of the government. It was felt that the defence of the realm justified a quiet hint's being given to the Bishop of Bodmin to convey to this indiscreet son in God that he would be well advised to keep a bridle on his tongue and a brake on his pen.

The Bishop was deeply shocked; but, as he told Archdeacon Doublebois, it was just what he had feared. However, he broke his rule of not communicating with Mark by sending him the following letter:

Lis Escop,  
Bodmin.

September 20th, 1915

Dear Mr. Lidderdale,

I have now waited patiently for over a year in the hope that the discipline under which I placed you would long ere this have restored you to a better mind. So far from this being the case, I am inexpressibly pained to hear that to your disloyal and contumacious behaviour towards your Bishop you have added what at a grave crisis like this in our national existence I can only characterize as disloyalty to your country. Political agitation ill befits a Presbyter of the Anglican Church at any time, but political agitation at such a moment is more than unseemly, it is criminal. Lest you should think that I am the victim of prejudice and inclined to condemn you without hearing what you have to say in your defence, I give you formal notice that within the next fortnight I shall hold an episcopal Visitation of your church in accordance with ancient ecclesiastical precedent to inquire into your alleged breaches of Church Law, in which connection I may refer you to the 123rd Canon. Furthermore, I shall inquire into your alleged tendency to preach in your church sermons that are calculated to encourage the enemy and affect the progress of recruiting in the Diocese. It may be, and I devoutly pray to Almighty God that it will be, it may be that I shall find you restored to a better mind and willing not merely to accord me the canonical obedience you owe, but also to make all amends in your power for the painful effect your sermons have had on the minds of those who have listened to them. In regard to the sermons I may add that I am not taking action in response to letters I have received, but at the request of the Naval and Military Authorities, who have already satisfied themselves by the most careful inquiries of the truth of the allegations against your preaching. Let me beg you most earnestly to consider your position during the fortnight which will elapse before I hold my Visitation. It will be most inexpressibly painful for me to take legal proceedings against you, but it is only fair that I should warn you most solemnly that unless I find you in a

better mind such is my intention. Is it too much to ask you at a time when the country is distracted by the prosecution of this most dreadful but most just and righteous war to curb your wilfulness for the sake of domestic peace and to subordinate your personal opinions to the good of the country? Can you not bring yourself, to use the touching colloquialism of the moment, can you not, will you not bring yourself to "do your bit"?

Believe me to be,  
Sincerely your Father in God,  
George Bodmin.

To which Mark replied:

My Lord Bishop,

There will be a trap waiting for you outside Rosemarket railway-station if you will let me know the day before the time of your train and the date of your Visitation.

Yours truly,  
Mark Lidderdale.

P.S. If you intend to come in the morning, please let me know two days beforehand, so that I can order a proper lunch.

The Bishop arrived on the fourth of October. Mark did not go into Rosemarket to meet him, but notified Isaac Jago, who had been elected people's warden when Major Drumgold resigned, possibly in the hope that the Vicar would be compelled to give up having Albert Prawle as his churchwarden inasmuch as Albert was Isaac Jago's carter. William John Evans had been nominated, but he had refused to stand. Mark took a good deal of sardonic pleasure in the thought of the Bishop's driving out with Isaac Jago. The farmer would find it difficult to state what precisely were the grievances of the parishioners, and as a local preacher he would find it hard to persuade the Bishop that he was being kept away from the church by his Vicar's behaviour.

"I had rather expected that you would meet me in person," the Bishop told Mark, after he had been lowered from Jago's high dog-cart and nearly collapsed into Mark's arms who was superintending the unloading from the drive.



"I'm sorry, my lord, but you would either have had to put up with a dull drive or a bad lunch, and I assumed that you'd prefer the dull drive. Besides, I thought you might care to begin the inquest—I should say the Visitation—by interviewing one of the churchwardens. Good morning, Jago!" He turned with a curt nod to the farmer, who was scowling at him.

The Bishop drew Mark aside and asked in a whisper what the churchwarden's name really was.

"J.A.G.O."

"Ah, J! I thought it couldn't really be D. It has been puzzling me all the way out. You ought to have let me know by letter what his name was," he added indignantly. "Is he going to lunch with us?"

"Not he," Mark laughed. "You're not going to lunch with me, Jago."

"What?" the farmer shouted. "Never!"

"It's all right, Jago, don't get angry. His lordship hoped you were; but I knew that our spoons in the Vicarage wouldn't be long enough for you. Now, what time will you want the trap to drive back, my lord?"

"Well, really, I'm not yet quite in a position to say," the Bishop replied. "I wish to interview some of the parishioners after we have had our personal talk. I wish, however, to be back at Lis Escop in time for dinner."

"You'd better catch the six o'clock train, and have tea at Roscorla," Mark advised.

"Roscorla?"

"That's Mr. Jago's farm. Do you hear, Jago? His lordship will have tea with you at half-past four. I'll drop him at the gate."

"Very pleased to see the gentleman," the farmer muttered, and whipped up his horse, thankful to be able to put the Vicarage and the Vicar behind him.

Indoors, Albert Prawle, dressed in his black clothes, was waiting to be presented to the Bishop.

"That's all right, Albert," Mark said, when the little man had, with half a genuflection, grasped the Bishop's outstretched hand and showed his appreciation of the honour by

giving it such a tremendous grip that his lordship seemed to be in some doubt of his friendliness. The courtesy paid, Albert withdrew backwards from the room.

"Your churchwarden seemed in a great hurry to be off," the Bishop remarked.

"He has to get back to his cottage and change out of his black clothes. He is Mr. Jago's carter, and he had to take advantage of the dinner hour to pay you his respects, my lord."

"Dear me," said the Bishop, who was beginning to look thoroughly bewildered. "That must make things rather difficult sometimes."

"Oh, it does," Mark agreed cheerfully. "Very difficult indeed. But Albert is such a good man with horses that the other churchwarden doesn't like to sack him. Of course, on Sundays it's quite all right, because Jago never comes to church."

The Bishop shook his head.

"Sad! Sad! Very sad! I managed during the drive out to learn something of what he feels at being driven away from the church."

"Forgive my directness, my lord, but do the feelings of a man who for the last twenty years has never attended church except for the harvest festival matter a very great deal? He is one of the chief local preachers, and was only elected churchwarden because it was thought in the parish that he could annoy me in that position more than any other parishioner."

"But what a triumph, what a triumph, Mr. Lidderdale, if by the moderation of your services you could have induced such a man to abandon the chapel for ever! Not that I am by any means in favour of promiscuous and often ill-considered proselytizing; but here surely there would have been some justification for making an effort to wean him from nonconformity."

"I'm afraid my church is too much of a cockatrice' den for that weaned child."

The Bishop looked annoyed.

"Isaiah," Mark said quickly. "I wasn't trying to be impertinent to your lordship."

"I did not suspect you of impertinence, Mr. Lidderdale," the Bishop replied majestically.

Mark suggested a stroll round the garden, for the noise of argument from the kitchen warned him that the final throes of the lunch were likely to be painful.

"Dear me," the Bishop said, "you have a very remarkably beautiful garden."

"It was largely planted by my grandfather, who was a great amateur of uncommon shrubs and trees," Mark said.

"Oh, indeed? I had not grasped that your grandfather was once Vicar of Nancepean. That is most interesting. Surely you would be sorry to give all this up?" The Bishop indicated with an ample gesture the palms and yuccas and dracænas, the thickets of bamboos, and the clumps of New Zealand flax.

"I'm afraid, my lord, that this is not quite the Eden you imagine. If I were turned out of it, there would be no need of a flaming sword which turned every way to keep me out of it for the rest of my life."

The Bishop frowned.

"That is the kind of remark, Mr. Lidderdale, which if it were made in public I should consider deplorable. Even here, in the privacy of your own garden, it strikes me as extremely ill-judged and not in very good taste. I fancy that during your painful disagreement with your parishioners you may have forgotten that other people have susceptibilities which can be wounded. Your sermons have, as you know, deeply pained a large number of people, and among the several duties I have to perform to-day is to counsel you—nay, more, to warn you very seriously—to keep a strict control over your tongue in this period of unparalleled national stress and anxiety. If in this matter you disregard my fatherly warning, you may find it very unpleasant, for at such times the Authorities are apt to move with disconcerting suddenness."

"I suppose you are alluding to one or two sermons I

preached this summer about our attitude as Christians to the war?" Mark said.

The Bishop inclined his head with a grave nod.

"I suppose," Mark went on, "that it is hardly necessary to say that my words were distorted and the effect of them grossly exaggerated."

"Pardon me, Mr. Lidderdale, the Authorities inquired into the matter and satisfied themselves that there were grounds for serious complaint. However much as Christians we may deplore the dreadful calamity that has overtaken the world, our duty as Englishmen is to assist our country by every means possible to destroy the dragon of militarism which threatens to swallow the whole of Europe in its hideous maw. Finally, Mr. Lidderdale, I am not exaggerating my own feelings when I say that I regard it as a Holy War waged against the forces of Evil."

"But, my lord, I have never thought that the war was anything but a just war. All that I have tried to say in my sermons has been that we ought not to lose sight of the spirit with which we entered upon our task. There is an increasing tendency to conduct this war for war's sake. The people at home become more prone to cant every day. This may be a just war, but that's not to say that war is just. However, I can assure your lordship that my words have been distorted, and I believe your lordship will credit me with frankness if with nothing else."

"I am quite willing to believe, Mr. Lidderdale, that you did not intend to seem in the slightest degree unpatriotic; but unless you had allowed yourself too much latitude in your utterances, I cannot bring myself to believe that the authorities would have levelled this complaint. This is not a time when people with heavy responsibilities are given to wasting their time in the investigation of trifles."

Mark allowed himself to smile.

"I assure you, Mr. Lidderdale, that it is no laughing matter," the Bishop declared emphatically. "I have warned you that you are playing with fire. If you do not choose to pay attention, the consequences to yourself may be graver than you imagine."



Luckily, Aunt Penelope interrupted the conversation by calling out across the lawn that lunch was ready.

"Dear me, lunch! Perhaps you will be good enough to let me wash my hands, Mr. Lidderdale?"

Mark led the way into the house.

When he and his guest were seated at table there was no sign for several minutes of any food. Mark was just going to ask the Bishop to excuse him while he paid a visit to the kitchen to find out what had happened when Aunt Penelope, looking very red and angry, came in and whispered hoarsely in Mark's ear:

"The omblick's all scat up."

"Well, make another one."

"There isn't no more eggsges."

"But surely you didn't use the whole of that dozen for the omelette?" Mark said. "Please excuse these domestic details, my lord, but we are not much accustomed to visitors."

"Oh yes, we did," Penelope said. "Every one we used, and one that was left over from the last dozen so well."

"Well, Penelope, surely you can manage something? His lordship is hungry."

"I'm sure he is, pore old chap," Penelope replied. "But if he feels so leery as all that how don't 'ee lev me open the tin tongue, till the beef be roasted fitty. 'Twould keep his stomach from calling out too much."

"Well, bring something, Penelope, and don't stand jabbering there," Mark said, wondering if he should have to drop his napkin and recover his gravity under the table.

"Pray, do not worry, Mr. Lidderdale. A piece of bread and cheese is really all I require."

However, in a minute or two Penelope came back to say that the beef was ready.

During lunch the Bishop talked about Tennyson and allowed controversy to subside for a while.

"You wrote a critical study of Tennyson, did you not, my lord?"

"Yes, I managed to produce a small work. A great poet, Mr. Lidderdale. And a good man, Mr. Lidderdale, and a gentleman. At the same time he was curiously touchy in

many ways. He disliked very much losing at backgammon. I once had the privilege of playing with him, and he was so much irritated by the contrariety of the dice that he knocked the board off the table. I remember at the time that the outburst struck me as almost elemental. Nor did he care much for criticism of his verse. I remember that I once asked him if he had ever noticed that in *The Lady of Shalott* he had used 'bearded' as an epithet for comets and for barley within a few stanzas of each other. And he clearly resented my pointing out to him what I should describe as a *lapsus calami*."

As soon as lunch was over, the Bishop became his pontifical self again and ceased to talk about the poets and peers he had known.

"Perhaps you will now show me your church, Mr. Lidderdale," he said in solemn accents; but he looked very much taken aback when Mark informed him that it was twenty minutes' walk away.

"Are we driving?" he asked.

"I'm afraid that we're not," Mark replied. "The road is really only a track for farm carts, and I think your lordship will find it less tiring to walk."

Mark nearly laughed aloud when he saw the Bishop negotiating the track along the valley between Church Cove and the Vicarage, the mud of which, after some recent heavy rains, made his gaiters look more like a gamekeeper's than a bishop's.

Dr. Tomlinson walked round the church in silence. He looked at the Stations of the Cross, and frowned. He looked at the image of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and frowned more deeply. He looked at the large crucifix over the pulpit, and scowled.

At the end of his inspection he turned to Mark and said in a Rhadamanthine voice:

"It is worse than I thought. It is far, far worse than anything I had ever imagined."

He asked Mark a few questions about his services, although, as he pointed out, it was scarcely necessary to ask questions when the evidence of his illegal practices was so

abundantly clear in the outward trappings of the church. Finally, he announced that he should like to visit one or two of the parishioners in order to assist him in the grave decisions he should presently be called upon to make.

"I'll show you the way, my lord."

"No, no. I would rather be alone, Mr. Lidderdale. I fear that there can be little profitable conversation between you and me after the defiant manner in which you have replied to my questions, and I prefer during the short time I can spare for investigation to be quite alone, Mr. Lidderdale."

"As your lordship wishes," said Mark, with a bow. He pointed to Pendhu hill and explained that Nancepean lay on the other side. "About half an hour's walk."

"Half an hour?" the Bishop repeated. "But is there no conveyance?"

"None," Mark replied. "Mr. Jago of Roscorla is giving you tea, and he will drive you to the station."

"You have done yourself no good by your behaviour to-day, Mr. Lidderdale. No doubt it may strike you as an excellent joke to have nearly succeeded in making this Visitation a farce. In my letter I warned you that I should come in accordance with ancient ecclesiastical precedent to inquire as Bishop into your alleged breach of Church law, and I referred you to the 123rd Canon. Once more I solemnly invite you to tell me if you intend to give up the Service of Benediction and the repetition of such things as the Litany of Loretto and the Litany of the Sacred Heart?"

"I shall not," Mark declared.

"Very well. Then I formally forbid the continued use of this service, and I order you to submit for my approval or disapproval any service whatsoever you wish to use in your church, apart from those in the Book of Common Prayer, or those for the use of which I have given a general permission throughout the diocese."

"I refuse," Mark said.

"I appeal to you to obey me. With the most solemn earnestness I remind you of the promises you gave at your Ordination, of the declarations you made at your Induction, and of your Oath to pay true and canonical obedience to your

Bishop in all things lawful and honest. I take upon myself, Mr. Lidderdale, I take entirely upon myself all the responsibility for exacting your obedience."

"I regret, my lord, that I cannot see my way so to shelve my own responsibilities. I admit my failure in Nancepean, but, believing as I do that Almighty God has a purpose for all things, I am determined not to escape from my failure by a feeble compromise. I do not believe that by surrendering I should help in any way the spiritual health of this parish. I do not believe that by resigning I should bring one soul nearer to God. I wish to make it perfectly clear that I have done what I have done because I believe that it was right to do it. Nothing but my forcible ejection from this living will prove that I have the courage of my convictions. I have nothing more to say, except that I regret very much that your lordship should consider that I have tried to turn your Visitation into a farce. Such was not my intention. I did not ask you to visit my church. It lay with those who did to make a suitable provision for your lordship's comfort and convenience."

"I do not absolve you from the very grossest discourtesy, Mr. Lidderdale," the Bishop said. "I consider that you have behaved outrageously in not making the necessary arrangements to lend a little dignity to my Visitation. In view of your defiant behaviour it was the least you could have done. How far did you say the village was?"

"About half an hour's quick walking."

"Atrocious! atrocious!" the Bishop muttered to himself, and without saluting Mark he set off on his walk.



## CHAPTER XXI

### DEPRIVATION

MARK heard nothing more from the Bishop personally; but the word went round the diocese that Dr. Tomlinson was making up his mind to institute legal proceedings against him in the Bishop's Court, that paradox of legal procedure in which the Bishop is himself accuser and judge.

Kennedy, who perhaps felt that he had not done all he might to help his fellow vicar, came down from Chypie to try to persuade him to give way.

"It's not the moment for an ecclesiastical fight," he said. "The war makes that sort of thing look like a petty squabble. You'll have no sympathizers. Give way now, my dear fellow, and then later on when you've pulled your work together—I mean to say when you've won back the confidence of your people—you can start again."

"If what I am doing will be right in times of peace, it is equally right in times of war," Mark replied. "My point is that if the English church is a part of the Catholic Church we can't always be cutting our coats according to the recognized clerical cloth. Every yard we have won in our long battle has been won by individuals who have refused to fall back from the advanced positions they have seized. The same arguments have always been used by the cautious. One of my earliest memories is of my father being tackled first by an archdeacon and then by a bishop. He gave way and died a miserable man in consequence. Rowley didn't give way, and his expulsion from Chatsea did more to help the Movement than anything."

"But Rowley's case was different," Kennedy argued. "Rowley had got his people. The Bishop of Silchester deliberately wrecked a going concern. Forgive me, my dear

fellow, when I say that Nancepean is not a going concern. I'm not blaming you. I don't think that even Rowley could have made it a going concern; but the fact remains that so long as your church is practically empty your enemies can claim that it is empty on account of your services."

"But how does that affect the fundamental dispute?" Mark demanded. "Either the Church of England believes in the Real Presence or it does not. If it does, the Bishop is wrong; and if he is wrong I should be committing a sin in obeying him by giving up Benediction."

"Frankly I doubt if your position is tenable in the matter of Benediction. Even the Romans can't have it without episcopal permission."

"That's not quite accurate," Mark said. "The Roman Bishops can regulate Benediction, but they cannot forbid it."

"But this is not the moment," Kennedy argued, "to fight for Benediction. When the war is over, I know that several priests in this diocese intend to take up a firm and united stand, but they feel that this is not the moment to win public sympathy for such a stand."

"In other words," Mark said bitterly, "let's get on with the war. Loud cheers."

"Well, and personally I don't think that's such a contemptible attitude as you imply."

"Look here, Kennedy, do you believe that you as a priest have the power to turn bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ?"

"Of course I do."

"I wonder if you really do believe it. If you do, I cannot understand how you dare to argue that this is or is not a suitable moment to bring home that stupendous fact in every way you can. Surely if God really is upon your altar, war and pestilence might sweep the world, and it would matter nothing. Not the moment to argue about or make a stand for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament! You know as well as I do that, although the Bishop will pretend that he has forbidden me to use it because it is a service not to be found in the Prayer Book, the true reason will be his

disbelief in the Real Presence. If I were to give way now I *should* put myself in the wrong. There would be no excuse for the way I've treated my Bishop. I should have been merely insolent."

"But surely Benediction is not to be fought for as one would fight for the Mass?"

"Why not?" Mark demanded fiercely. "What is Benediction except a demonstration of our desire to avail ourselves of the Divine privilege granted to us in the Mass? And surely this of all others is the very moment to do that?"

"Well, I don't believe that it is," Kennedy declared.

"No, because you don't believe in the Real Presence," Mark replied.

"What rubbish!" Kennedy's pink face flushed crimson with indignation. "What rubbish you allow yourself to talk, Lidderdale."

"My dear Kennedy, you can't believe in It. And when you all argue with me about this, I begin to wonder if the Church of England really does believe in It either."

Stephen Ogilvie wrote Mark a long letter imploring him to give way, but Mark answered him very much as he had answered Kennedy. Drogo Mortemer advised him to give way. So did Heriot. So did Chator, writing explosively from St. Wilfrid's, Notting Hill. Even Cyril Nash, who had been to Nancepean and understood better than the others the state of affairs there, thought that perhaps, all things being taken into consideration, it was advisable to give way for the present. But Mark paid no attention to any of them.

Then the Bishop in accordance with the provision of the Act of 1840 appointed a Commission to report if there was a *primâ facie* case on which proceedings might be taken against the Vicar of Nancepean. Renewed efforts were made to bring the matter before some tribunal which Mark would accept, even though it would not be recognized by the State, and would therefore have no power to coerce the Vicar of Nancepean, should he refuse to abide by its decision. However, Mark saved any farther argument by refusing to pay any more attention to such a tribunal than he

intended to pay to the sentence of the Bishop promulgated from his Court in the Cathedral. The Bishop agreed to such a tribunal if the Vicar of Nancepean would promise to abide by its decision, but the Vicar of Nancepean would not, and he begged all his friends to give up trying to arrange matters.

Sometime in January Mark was summoned to the Bishop's Court, but he refused to attend. The Bishop decided that all the charges against him were proved, and early in February he gave his judgment and deprived the Vicar of Nancepean of his benefice.

The Bishop's difficulty was how to get another priest to take Mark's place at a time when so many of the clergy were away at the front as chaplains. In the end he had to come himself and give a visible sign to the parish that Mark was no longer the vicar. There was something about Dr. Tomlinson's personality that roused Mark to do all he could to make him look idiotic, so inasmuch as all the sacred vessels belonged to himself he removed them to the Vicarage, and left nothing as he thought with which the Bishop could celebrate. There did remain, however, the cup in which Miss Horton had been wont to pour out the Vicar's morning tea after Mass. With this utensil for chalice and with some bread with which he had provided himself in order to avoid having to use wafers the Bishop celebrated.

Meanwhile, Mark locked himself into the Vicarage and waited until he was ejected, as he supposed he should be ejected, by the police.



## CHAPTER XXII

### THE STRANGER

A FORTNIGHT later, in much the same way as elderly retired colonels were dug out by the Military Authorities, the Reverend Herbert Windimere Dowling was dug out by the Bishop to minister to the spiritual needs of Nancepean. This greybeard, who rode a tricycle, had for many years been incapable of more active work than was implied in looking after one of those funny little Gothic churches that the English and the Germans used to be fond of erecting in Latin pleasure resorts. Anxious to do his bit and release a younger clergyman for the needs of the troops, he had returned from whatever minor resort in the Riviera had been accustomed to his wintry ministrations. He went to live at the Hanover Inn, where he was a great deal more comfortable than he would have been at the Vicarage; but because Mark refused to surrender the Vicarage Mr. Dowling felt that he had a grievance. The scandalous way he was being treated by the deprived incumbent became another legend in the district, where it was everywhere reported and generally believed that Mark had on several occasions shot at the Reverend H. W. Dowling from behind a hedge, had knocked him off his tricycle, and had made faces at him through the East window while he was celebrating.

The truth was that the Bishop wanted Mark to abandon the Vicarage without the intervention of the police, while Mark was as equally determined that the police should intervene, so that his expulsion from Nancepean could be given the maximum of effective propaganda. For Mark the most serious problem was money. So long as he had the money to pay the Prawles they would see about his supplies; but he did not fancy that their fidelity would endure

beyond a month of going without their wages, perhaps not even so long.

Every morning when Mark walked up to Chypie to hear Mass, Kennedy urged him strongly to leave the Vicarage.

"What do you gain by holding out?" he asked. "Old Cobweb"—this was Kennedy's name for the Reverend H. W. Dowling—"Old Cobweb is perfectly comfortable and happy at the Hanover, but so long as he can say you're keeping him out of the vicarage the Bishop will be able to consider himself the martyr. It's not as if you had a number of devoted souls who would suffer from your abandonment of the parish."

"I suppose you've been talking over the situation with Mrs. Evans," Mark suggested. "You've got very serious latterly, Kennedy. The war seems to have wiped out most of your sense of humour, together with a lot of other things."

"You've turned so bitter, Lidderdale. Whatever the Bishop has done, it was owing to your own behaviour that he was able to do it. And, although you feel that the people have treated you badly, you must remember that they feel exactly the same about your treatment of them."

"I wish you'd try to grasp that I have a very definite grievance against my parish," Mark said. "No, I don't propose to tell you what it is. It really doesn't matter what you or anybody else thinks with only a superficial knowledge of the circumstances that have brought about the present state of affairs in Nancepean. I cannot go into certain matters merely with the object of defending my action. I don't defend my action. I don't defend myself. But until the Bishop sends a policeman to eject me I shall remain in the Vicarage. And while I am there and make use of your church, Kennedy, I should be grateful if you would give up trying to argue with me. Otherwise you will put me to the inconvenience and fatigue of walking the eight long miles to Polamonter every morning."

Kennedy shook his head sadly.

"I'll say no more, Lidderdale, for I realize that no man can fully understand another man's motives."

The sense of failure and the depressing effect of Mark's solitude was increased by the grey March weather. Spring came as late as Lent that year. It was seeming impossible to wait much longer for the Bishop to call in the aid of the police; and a letter from Miss Horton threatening to invade Nancepean again was almost the last straw.

My dear Vicar, she wrote. I wonder if you received the letter I sent you from Nish just before we had to evacuate the town. I have had a really thrilling time and was right through the retreat. I am staying with my sister-in-law and have my dear old Rover with me again. He knew me perfectly well even in my nurse's uniform. I have just heard about the dreadful events in Nancepean, and I am wondering very much if you would care for me to come down and stand by you. I have been given three months' leave to recover from what I'm bound to say was rather a strenuous time. But you know how energetic I am, and how I hate doing nothing. I am longing to hear all the news of Nancepean, and I honestly believe that even you would be a little interested to hear some of my experiences. I loved the Serbians. They were so plucky. I quite lost my heart to a certain Captain Popovitch, a great blond giant of a man, but I lost sight of him in Corfu. Poor fellow, I'm afraid he may have died. However, I did not set out to tell you of my adventures, but to ask you if there was nothing I could do for you. Rover sends his love.

Yours very sincerely,

Isabel Horton.

Just send a postcard "yes" or "no," or if you telegraph I can come at once, because my brother is coming back on short leave in a day or two and my sister-in-law will enjoy having him to herself.

Mark told Aunt Penelope not to allow anybody to come near the house while he went in to Rosemarket and sent a telegram.

"This telegram will be sure to reach Essex to-night?" he asked anxiously at the post office.

"Oh, I think so," the young woman said languidly. "Miss Hoskins, this telegram will get to Essex to-night, won't it?"

"Why shouldn't it?" Miss Hoskins countered disagreeably.

"It's very urgent," Mark almost pleaded. "I'll read it through, shall I?"

*Horton, Kings Dainton, Essex*

*Conditions here make visit absolutely impossible*

*Lidderdale*

He supposed that he ought to have put in Miss Horton's Christian name, but not even on a telegram could he bring himself to write "Isabel."

When Mark reached the turning down to Nancepean and was hesitating for a moment whether to take it or walk round the longer way by Chypie in order to avoid passing through the village, a tall, thin man of foreign appearance who had been studying the signpost raised his hat and asked him if there was an inn at Nancepean.

"Yes, the Hanover Inn."

The stranger asked if it was comfortable.

"Quite comfortable."

"And really quiet?"

"Extremely so."

Mark wondered who the stranger could be. He had long outlived the stage of supposing that every human being not immediately recognizable was a spy; but this man's unusual questions, coupled with his slightly foreign appearance, did make him entertain the suspicion for a moment.

"No, I'm not a spy," the other said with a sarcastic smile. "Nor does this small hand-bag—my only luggage—contain a complete signalling outfit. And, although my hair is black and curly and my skin dark, I am not a foreigner."

Mark admitted that he had asked himself the question.

"And a very natural question for a clergyman to ask," the stranger said. "Why shouldn't you be allowed to do your bit? Why shouldn't you suppose for a moment that the future of the British Empire rests upon your initiative?"



I'm really sorry to disappoint you by not being what I seem. I really am. My own sceptical mind is delighted when I find appearances belied. But I can sympathize with the credulous mind, though frankly I think that it is enjoying itself a little too heartily at the present. Such a debauch of myth-making!"

Mark was wondering to himself while the stranger was talking if he should offer him the hospitality of the Vicarage. Presumably he was not conventional and would take such an invitation in the right spirit. It would be a relief to have somebody to talk to again, somebody, moreover, who was apparently quite free from the stock opinions of the moment. Unless he had some kind of companionship, Mark did not feel that he could stand the isolation of his existence much longer. He should soon have to leave the Vicarage and gratify the Bishop by a tame surrender.

While Mark was revolving this plan in his mind the stranger had lapsed into silence, and was now regarding him with an amused expression.

"I'm sorry to interrupt your daydream," he said, "but unless you have some valuable information to give me about this inn—what is it called? Oh yes, the Hanover—I think I'd better be getting along, for if it does not suit me I shall have to continue along these empty coasts until I do find just the spot for which I'm looking."

"I wonder if you'd care to spend a little time with me in my vicarage," Mark asked. "I live rather economically, and if you want luxuries you'll have to buy them for yourself, because I have scarcely any money. You'd be quiet enough."

"Can I have a convenient window for signalling to submarines and a convenient cave or cellar for storing the petrol with which I supply them?" the stranger inquired gravely.

"No, really, I'm in earnest," Mark said. "I ought to explain that I have just been deprived of my living . . ."

"Ah, congratulations," the stranger interposed. "What have you been doing, getting drunk? Or seducing the wife of one of the sidesmen?"

"My offences were ecclesiastical," Mark replied. "As a criminal you will find me dull."

He had involuntarily assumed his companion's manner of speech as the best way of bringing him down to a simple and more natural way of expressing himself.

"Well, it's really very kind of you," the stranger said, "but I don't feel that I ought to take advantage of your refreshing lack of suspicion. You have been deprived of a living, but I have been deprived of civic rights. I object to being conscribed, and I am proposing to avoid it as long as I can."

"A conscientious objector?"

"Not, I fancy, in the usual significance of the term. That is to say I have no religious qualms about fighting. What I object to is forming fours. To me the liberty of the individual is infinitely more important than the freedom of small nations."

Mark once more pressed the stranger to accompany him. He was thinking that he might be able to build up some kind of edifice for himself out of the material that was left lying about after a certain amount of verbal destructiveness.

"Here is my card," said the stranger. "Let me see, have I given you the right name? Yes, that really is my name. Fox. Horatio Fox. I had several sets of false cards printed, because I really am not at all anxious to be conscribed. It might astonish you to know how strongly I feel on the subject of my personal liberty."

They walked along together by the more circuitous road to the Vicarage, Mark congratulating himself upon a pleasant way out of his boredom and Mr. Fox evidently much gratified to have found a patient and intelligent listener.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### IMPRESSIONISM

MR. FOX was delighted with the Vicarage. "At last!" he sighed. "Do you know, this is the first time since August, 1914, that I have been able to believe that we shall one day be at peace again. Now do tell me the history of your ecclesiastical troubles. I know and care so little about ecclesiastical troubles. But I am sure that the ecclesiastical troubles of such a hospitable clergyman as yourself will have a peculiar quality of their own."

Mark gave Mr. Fox an account of his time at Nancepean, not omitting, as usually, the real cause of his bitterness, for he found it much easier to be confidential with this stranger than with his friends.

"Extraordinary," Mr. Fox commented when the narrative was finished.

"That people should be such swine?" Mark said.

"No, no! Oh no, no, indeed I don't find that at all extraordinary. What I do find extraordinary is that apparently you believe in all that kind of thing. How do you do it? You can't be just a credulous nincompoop, or you would certainly have been positive that I was a spy."

"I don't know," Mark said. "Some people would say I was more credulous in believing that you weren't a spy. Any excess of scepticism in one direction implies credulity in another. It's not really less credulous to believe in nothing than to believe in everything."

"Ah now, come, you're taking the discussion into the region of merely verbal logic, and that's as good as taking it nowhere. Let's begin with the rock on which I always strike—personal immortality, by which I mean that when I die I shall retain my self-conscious ego. If I believed that, I shouldn't have much difficulty with the rest of it.

There is no rock like that in the ocean of a material philosophy."

"I'm not sure that there aren't several," Mark objected. "For instance, I come to grief over the finiteness of the universe, for even though, as we are informed, there may be a star-cloud estimated to be six trillion miles away, the light of which takes a million years to reach us, that is far from infinity. And what is finite in space cannot be eternal in time. Therefore it had a beginning. In other words, it was created."

"Wait a minute," said Fox. "In that case surely you are arguing against immortality rather than in favour of it?"

"Not at all, because it is clear that my immortality cannot be stated in terms of this finite universe. But if, as I am arguing, the universe is finite and not eternal, the Creator will ultimately be left without the created, which is to annihilate the Creator and is to me unimaginable. That's one of my rocks."

"Yes, and it's also what is called a heresy," Fox interposed.

But Mark did not stop to argue this. "Another of my rocks," he went on, "is that the most recent astronomical theory of the origin of our solar system inclines one to suppose not only that our sun is the centre of the universe, but that it may be the only star with a planetary system. Furthermore, the tidal cataclysm caused by the gravitation of a visiting star, which was what probably sent earth and the rest of the planets and their satellites spinning off on their own orbits, was also probably exceptional. Now it is, to say the least, extremely improbable that any of the other planets are inhabited, or, if they are, that they are inhabited by a form of life in the least like man. Such an hypothesis would seem quite as improbable as immortality to the ideal observer. If, then, by this extraordinary accident to one sun alone of the fifteen hundred million stars estimated to make up our universe the conditions that made human life possible were produced, I see no reason against supposing that by another equally extraordinary accident God should incarnate Himself in one of those human beings. The rock



I strike on is that the more knowledge of his Creator that God allows man to acquire, the more it bears out the intuitive knowledge of Him granted by revelation. I could easily have disbelieved in immortality when science hung the world in a crystal firmament, but, when I think of that star-cloud number six thousand and something and its remoteness of six million million million miles, I cannot presume to be confidently sceptical of immortality. And then, to step down from these stellar immensities into the minute world of the entomologist, I come to grief again over mimetic insects. I can extend the age of the earth to any number of million years you like, but I still can't accept accidental variation as the complete explanation. Still less can I accept what amounts to mere chance as the explanation of the complicated relationships between certain caterpillars and certain ants. The biologists won't allow us to believe that the insects themselves are conscious of their behaviour, with which theory I feel inclined to agree, but I cannot refuse to believe that some universal mind is conscious on their behalf. Once I believe in that Mind I believe in a creative God, and once I believe in a creative God my reason revolts from supposing Him to be an omniscient and omnipotent Being with the destructiveness of an ape."

"But I do not see why destructiveness should be attributed to this Being merely because such a Being sees no advantage in preserving the self-consciousness of every individual when the physical constituents of his personality no longer exist."

"It would be merely destruction," Mark argued, "to allow self-consciousness, which is what I assume is what you call the soul, and then annihilate it. It's obvious that without man, Nature, red-toothed and red-clawed if you like, would work with the maximum of efficiency judged as a vast whole. For what reason is man allowed to develop to the point of self-consciousness merely to be destroyed? For what reason is he allowed to imagine immortality and spend his life on earth in the shadow of a vast delusion?"

"But I don't believe in this rational Creator," Fox said, "though He's not the rock on which I strike. I've sunk long before I reach Him. Yet, convince me of my personal

immortality, and I'll accept God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost with avidity. Some people manage to believe in an immortality to come by believing in an immortality that always was. I think that they're in a stronger logical position than the orthodox believers. I can conceive that what always was always will be, but I simply cannot believe that what never was always will be. And I wonder if you really do believe in your personal immortality. It seems to me that if you did you would be so utterly indifferent to everything that happened in this material world. . . ."

"Great saints have been," Mark interposed.

"Well, really, you'll forgive me if I say that I cannot admit any peculiar saintliness in excess of credulity. To return to yourself, surely what is making you unhappy is the conviction at the back of your mind that your labours in Nancepean have been all to no purpose? You came here with an ideal religion to which you hoped to convert people, and all that happened was that you were slandered and reviled. I maintain that, if you really did believe in what you claim to believe, you wouldn't mind what was said about you by your enemies. That immortal substance of you could not be affected by calumny. It's the feeling that there is no immortal substance and that the fragile evanescent form of flesh proclaiming your humanity and sheltering for awhile your personality has been irreparably hurt which makes you so resentful. I should not object to conscription if I believed that I had an immortal soul; but, believing as I do that this life is all I have, I see no reason why I should sacrifice it wholly or in part for the benefit of others."

"I don't think it's really possible to argue about one's belief in immortality," Mark said. "But I am quite clear that I do believe in it most fervently."

Yet actually while he was making this affirmation, Mark was wondering to himself if he meant what he said. It was not so much that he was shaken by his guest's arguments, for he had heard them often enough before; but the personality of the tall thin man leaning back so serenely in that deep armchair impressed him with some of its own confident nihilism. He had on Mark the effect of an accom-

plished conjurer who with a gesture makes a familiar object dissolve into nothing.

"Forgive the impertinence," Mr. Fox was saying, "but were your parents religious?"

"Yes."

"And perhaps your grandparents?"

"Yes."

"I was sure of it. The more I observe the religious temperament, the more I find that in nearly every case it is inherited. Now if the religion in which you claim to believe is true, you must admit that it is very unfair that you should start with a great advantage over somebody like myself who has inherited no religious tendency of any kind?"

"Not necessarily," Mark said, "for the more I am given by God, the more I have to pay to God."

"No, no, that's an evasion of the point at issue. I'm not attempting to discuss the rewards and punishments of religion. I'm discussing faith without any question of what one does with that faith. Let us suppose that I die to-night. Very well, my soul, as you would call it, rises from the husk of my body like a butterfly from its chrysalis and is confronted by that immense shadowy concept you call God. 'Ha—ha,' says God, 'you did not believe in Me when you walked about the earth in that rapidly putrefying bit of flesh which you thought was yourself. Well, here I am all the time. What have you got to say for yourself now?' 'Superficially, God, the laugh is on Your side,' I should reply. 'But before You proceed to condemn me to whatever punishment You have selected for my lack of faith, let me ask You one or two questions. First of all,' I should say, 'are You omniscient?' 'I am.' 'In that case,' I should continue, 'You knew that I did not believe in You.' 'I knew it perfectly well.' 'Secondly,' I should continue, 'are You omnipotent?' 'I am.' 'In that case, why did You allow me not to believe in You? You had only got to give me perfect faith, and I flatter myself I should have kept all Your commandments. Indeed, I have a much bigger grievance against You than You have against me. At the present moment You have arranged for a mundane war to take place.

In that war thousands of human beings are being slaughtered or dying of disease every day, some because they were inspired to fight from vanity, some from false shame, some from a sense of duty to their fellow men, some because they were so situated that they could not avoid fighting, some from ambition, some from professional conscientiousness, and some, but very few, because they believe in You. Now, if I, when I ruled that piece of flesh which is now the sport of worms, had been granted faith in You, I would willingly have died in the Great War simply because it was pleasing to You. Instead You let me die sceptically in my bed. It may be Your idea of Divine Justice, but it is not mine.’”

“But have you ever wanted to believe?” Mark asked.

Mr. Horatio Fox hesitated for a moment and frowned.

“No, frankly, I have not,” he replied at last, yet somehow not quite frankly. “But then again, it is up to God to make me want to believe in Him. You have evidently wanted to believe in Him. You have tried so hard to do so that you have managed to deceive yourself into supposing that you do believe in Him. But are you happier for it? No, and a thousand times no, no, no! And the reason is that you don’t believe in Him.”

“You forget that the God whom you find so unreasonable was according to my faith incarnate and revealed Himself as Love,” Mark observed.

“Courtesy forbids me to argue that point,” Mr. Fox replied. “To me the identification of Jesus Christ with the petulant, irrational, definitely disagreeable old patriarch of the Jews seems pathetically, even pitifully childish. But I should prefer not to argue it, because although people are prepared to listen to a certain amount of what they would consider blasphemy about God the Father their feelings are wounded by any of the same kind of criticism of God the Son. Which, of course, proves that they don’t really believe in God the Father and that they only believe in God the Son as they believed in Joe Chamberlain or as at the present moment they believe in Kitchener. Humanity itself defied Jesus Christ, which gives Him a much greater claim upon human loyalty. It’s really a manifestation of the paternal



instinct in man. We always look after our own from our bicycles to our divinities. Our politicians have cleverly exploited this paternal instinct in the prosecution of this war. It's my war, everybody says to himself. The Italians, being the most realistic of European nations, are quite frank on this subject. '*La nostra guerra*,' they say without a blush. 'Our own little tin-pot war against Austria. What do we care about Europe?' Soon, and I hope devoutly that it really will be soon, we shall discover that it wasn't our war at all, and that the various 'records' we've broken in the way of deaths and mutilations, guns and gas and prodigal expenditure were not of our own seeking, but were forced upon us by the politicians, by secret diplomacy, and by I know not how many absurdities for which we are just as much responsible as for the war. Already there is a tendency for the young men to accuse the old men of having made the war. And popular sentiment is beginning to veer round from the point of view that the young men must go first into playing with the idea that the middle-aged are really the lads to kill. Well, they won't kill me if from now until the end of the war I never spend more than a night under the same roof. With a celluloid collar and one spare flannel shirt of that peculiar tint of dirty grey, which is the choice of nearly all the really intelligent men I have met, I defy them."

"Do you mean that you'll really go on wandering about England to avoid being conscripted?" Mark exclaimed. "But surely you'd only be substituting one tyranny for another?"

"I shouldn't be forming fours," said Mr. Fox. "Why should I, a man of thirty-seven, in possession of just enough money to allow himself to live frugally but well, to buy all the books worth reading that appear annually, to hear all the music and see all the plays worth hearing and seeing, to spend March and April round the Mediterranean, why should I be pitched into a life for which I am totally unfitted? Why should I have to put up with the bullying of a ridiculous padded creature with a waxed moustache and a

Cockney accent merely because a number of incompetent amateurs of intrigue have involved me in this mess?"

"Are you asking the question rhetorically, or do you expect me to supply you with an answer?" Mark inquired.

"There is no answer," Mr. Fox went on. "Or at any rate there is no answer which would not imply that I was expected to do something for somebody else, and I refuse to accept that as a valid reason for forming fours. At least I am a frank individualist. I do withdraw openly from the herd. I do not pretend to hunt with the pack and spend my time trying to disable the two hounds on either side of me."

"But if you feel so confident of the impregnable strength of your moral position," Mark pressed, "why do you bother to defend it so volubly? Why waste so much verbal powder and shot? I should be inclined to hazard that you are not quite so secure as you pretend to be. You seem to me to be trying all the time to convince yourself that all is well with you."

"The verb 'to seem' gives you away," the other declared. "Impressionism, impressionism! There's the malady of the age from which you're suffering. Yes, we were taught at school to write our Latin prose as much like Cicero's as possible, but we were forbidden his *esse videatur*. We were told that it was a bad trick of his. The instinct of the pedagogue was right. There is something most damnably soft, flaccid, medullary, and gelatinous about 'seems to be.' One realizes why Cicero always chose the wrong side. Yes, it was *esse videatur* that brought him down finally at Caieta. But compared with us Cicero was an adamantine realist. We are all Hamlets nowadays, undecided about ourselves, undecided about everybody else, undecided what to think either about the universe or about God; and when we do make up our minds about anything, as, for instance, when we made up our minds to declare war on Germany, we find out soon afterwards that we decided wrong. And the fault is our impressionism. We have no standards of reality. A bourgeois pragmatism is the philosophy we deserve, and we have got it."

He paused for a moment for breath, and Mark ventured to break in:

"But a good deal of what you're saying now is what I should say as a Catholic."

"But you're not a Catholic," said Mr. Fox, "except so far as your impressionism makes you seem to be one. *Esse videatur!* You will admit that I am, religiously speaking, a disinterested observer? Very well, I assure you that the claim of the High Church Anglicans to be Catholics strikes a disinterested observer as merely funny. I hate Catholicism, which I regard as nothing but an elaborate trap to ensnare the individual; but at least it is a well-made trap. The mechanism is perfect of its kind. Look at your present position in this vicarage, waiting to be turned out of it by a policeman. How can you possibly without a dose of impressionism strong enough to deprive you of your faculties pretend that you or your Bishop or your Church have any kind of relation to Catholicism? It is impressionism in politics that has brought about this war. An *entente cordiale* instead of an alliance? Impressionism. An illusion that the interests of this country are bound up with those of France, Russia, and Italy? Impressionism. I could go on with the catalogue for a week, but I expect that like all the other Hamlets of to-day you're more anxious to talk about yourself than listen to other people. What is the success of psycho-analysis over the staid old psychology? It encourages people to talk about themselves. One way that the war might end will be that the intellectuals won't be able to contain themselves much longer. They will simply have to visit Germany in order to be psycho-analysed. It is really a minor tragedy of the time that psycho-analysis is an enemy product, and for the moment a kind of intellectual contraband. But what a debauch of it they will have after the war! Yet I could psycho-analyse all Bloomsbury now. They all suffer from an inferiority complex. Either they feel themselves intellectually inferior to Newton or physically inferior to Sandow or morally inferior to Christ, and since by their own standards of culture only the best contents them, they suffer acutely from their own deficiencies. Just as

Byron discovered swimming to be the noblest exercise because it concealed his club-foot, so a Bloomsbury intellectual will admire Byzantine Art because he cannot be another Michelangelo. Why do you suppose that the Bloomsbury intellectual will object to being conscribed?"

"For the same reason as you, I suppose. He won't like being taught to form fours."

"No, of course, he won't like that," Mr. Fox agreed. "And if that were all he objected to, I should have no right to sneer at him. But the Bloomsbury intellectual will suffer more acutely than I, because he will be thinking not merely that the drill-sergeant is a fool, but also that the general is a fool. He will be thinking that he should be where the general is. That wouldn't worry me. I take my stand simply on the fact that nobody has any right to claim authority over me. In a universe made utterly insecure for the un-mathematical mind by the higher mathematicians, I have been reduced to one solid fact of which they cannot deprive me. That solid fact is myself as long as I live. I decline to surrender it. I intend to cherish it and to guard it with solicitude and affection. Self! Glorious self! It is sweet and seemly to die for one's country, but how much more sweet, how much more seemly, to live for one's self."

"But the impressionism in me of which you complain," Mark said, "what is that but the cultivation of self? Surely the discovery of ourselves has been the cause of this impressionism? Was there ever a greater impressionist than Rousseau?"

"Precisely. But Rousseau was only aware of himself impressionistically," said Mr. Fox. "He was in love with his reflection, like Narcissus. He was interested in his image. And he has launched us on this intellectual Narcissism. Rousseau never knew himself, as, for instance, Nietzsche knew himself. Forgive me for recurring once again to the subject of your religion, but the mention of Nietzsche reminds me of Wagner's Parsifalism, and what is your religion but Parsifalism? You are obsessed by redemptivist phantoms. In all that you have told me of your life here and elsewhere I perceive you the victim of an absurd idea



that you have to save other people. Even your own God Jesus Christ made no attempt to do that. Of course, His disciples had to explain His ultimate failure, and so the legend of His dying to save the world was invented. But Christ's own advice to others was to save themselves."

"I think you misunderstand what you call my redemptivism," Mark said. "I regard myself as an automatic purveyor of Almighty God's bounteous Grace by administering His Sacraments. My saving of other people is on a par with the doctor's. The doctor warns a man who comes to consult him that if he behaves in a certain way he will die. Meanwhile, in order to help him, he gives him medicine. I have the spiritual medicine for those who demand it. The whole trouble here is that the people won't realize that they need any medicine."

"So that you've behaved," Mr. Fox retorted quickly, "like a doctor whom nobody consults and who finally, in desperation, goes out into the street and forcibly pours his drugs down the throats of the passers-by. And yours is a particularly bad case, because you're not really a qualified doctor. You hold no diploma from a recognized body."

"You mean to say that the Orders of the Anglican Church are invalid?"

"Well, it would be absurd for me to argue about that," Mr. Fox replied. "I might as well argue whether one bit of paste was a more genuine diamond than another bit of paste. You mean by the validity of Anglican orders that you claim to be able to work the magic as efficaciously as the genuine Catholics? Have you ever looked through the catalogues of the manufacturers of conjuring-tricks? 'This is the real Indian rice-bowl trick,' one will say. 'No celluloid fakes, no conjurer's wax, no invisible threads. All solid brass and only obtainable from me. Beware of cheaper imitations.' Well, frankly, I believe your trick to be an imitation. It's not good enough for the professional conjurer. England is a nation of amateurs. It's one of the things I like best about my country until we get into a mess such as we're in at the present moment. Then I hate amateurs. I imagine that if I could take religion seriously I

should have the same kind of horror for amateur priests which, please forgive me, is the way I regard the ritualistic clergymen of the English Church. However, I cannot help thinking that you in your own heart thoroughly agree with me."

"I wonder why you think that," Mark said.

"Well, there's something honest and hard about you. Perhaps I'm falling a victim to the impressionism that I so much dislike and allowing my judgment to be influenced by your hospitality. But I don't think so. Moreover, you *have* managed to consider yourself in spite of all temptations. You've enjoyed having your own way and you see no reason why you should let this ridiculous bishop play the drill-sergeant over you. Really, you and I are in much the same position. We're both trying to dodge what other people consider an obligation."

"I'm at such a disadvantage in my argument with you," Mark said. "I always have to assume premisses which you will always refuse to accept. My behaviour must be judged on the postulate that I do believe in the Christian faith, which, furthermore, I believe to be identical with the Catholic religion. It would be foolish for me to try to explain to you why I am not a Roman Catholic. It would be an elaboration of the technicabilities of ecclesiastical government, of the minutiae of hierarchical claims."

"On the contrary," Mr. Fox said, "the weakness of your logical position is exposed by such a refusal. The fundamental absurdity of a premiss does not affect the logic of the conclusion provided that the syllogism is not a false one. The premisses of Catholicism are unjustifiable, but the perfection of the Catholic syllogism is unassailable. You object to compromise over the religion you preach and practise. That is illogical, because the English Church is erected upon a compromise. You claim that the English Church is an insular modification of the type comparable, let us say, to the lighter cream of the border round a native Camberwell Beauty compared with the continental form. I as a disinterested critic do not recognize the English Church as a modification, but consider it an entirely distinct species.

Compromise and inclusiveness if carried too far crystallize into something *sui generis*. *Bouillabaisse* and *olla podrida* have by now become characteristic dishes. Brass may be an alloy of copper, but its effect is of being a distinct metal."

"But the Apostolic Succession was not broken at the Reformation," Mark said. "That is the important point for us. We are really arguing at cross purposes. Indeed, I might carry the war into your camp and say that your estimate of the English Church is pure impressionism. Judged so, I admit that the English Church is a monster . . ."

"Indeed, yes," Mr. Fox interposed. "A sphinx with the head of Britannia and the body of the British lion."

"But that is merely the simulacrum. You recognize in the Roman Church the significant form which æsthetics demand, and which indicates the reality that it clothes. The English Church, I admit, lacks any such significant form, but the reality is there. You don't believe in the reality of either Church, and therefore, having only externals from which to form your opinion, you perceive the superficial absurdities and contradictions of the English Church and suppose that it really is absurd and contradictory."

"Like most Englishmen," Mr. Fox replied, "you think that what is only insular is actually mundane, even cosmic. The English are the most tolerant nation in the world. The English Church is designed to hold all, and there is no doubt whatever that the designers of the English Church intended it to take the place of the Catholic Church. It was ecclesiastically the same kind of thing that Drake and the Elizabethan sea-dogs had been doing imperially. The idea that it was a privileged supplement to the Roman Catholic Church came much later. You get the same kind of anomaly as the English Church in the part England has played in this war. It begins with an *entente cordiale* supposed to have been brought about by King Edward VII, in which, contrary to the proverb, water is thicker than blood. It ends, or at any rate for the moment it has ended, in making us temporarily one of the nations of Europe. But in his heart no Englishman really believes himself to be a European. As soon as peace is declared we shall want to withdraw from Europe

across the Channel once more. What is more typical than our attitude to Ireland? Ireland claims to be one of the European nations. We reply that she is one of the English nations. One of the reasons why I object to this war is that as an Englishman I shall resent belonging to a nation that is only one of the most powerful, for inevitably if Germany wins she will be our equal, and if France wins she will be our equal. America, merely by the exhaustion of the others, will be another equal. About Russia I have no opinion, but I suppose if we give her Constantinople she will be another equal. What will be the future of civilization with so many equal Powers? A pretty poor future until one nation is restored to the indubitable leadership."

"I don't quite see how all this applies to the English Church," Mark said. "You're still arguing about externals. The point I want to make is that we English priests believe that Apostolic Succession was not interrupted at the Reformation. We don't believe in Papal Infallibility, because we weren't consulted. Roman Catholics say that our orders are invalid because the Pope has condemned them. We say that the Pope is not infallible, because he has condemned our orders. I admit that my spiritual home is Rome, but I cannot believe that I am not a priest. And so I'm just holding on somehow."

"A kind of ecclesiastical Micawber," Mr. Fox laughed. "Well, we mustn't argue any longer, for it's not fair to stand on the bank and argue with a man in the water."

Three or four days after this conversation Mr. Horatio Fox told his host that he must be moving on.

"But, my dear sir, why cut your visit short?" Mark said. "Please don't think that I mind your criticisms of me and my religion. On the contrary, I have been thoroughly enjoying myself for the first time in getting on for two years now."

"Yes, but I've already outstayed my limit. It's not that I think my presence here will attract attention, but I'm afraid of getting too comfortable and then having suddenly to flit and take to the road again. Provided I keep on like the



Wandering Jew, I may get used to it before the war is over."

"When do you think the war will be over?" Mark asked.

"The Great European Bore?" Mr. Fox replied pensively. "Well, I don't see how it can last longer than another seven years. That would make it 1923. Then the peace will take two years—1925. And the results of the peace, say another twenty years. No, taking everything into consideration, I shouldn't care to say that the war would be over before 1945, by which time we shall be ready for another. But I should be getting on for seventy, and my class would scarcely be called up before I had died a natural death."

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE BISHOP'S SUBSTANCE

MARK missed Mr. Horatio Fox and his conversation when his visitor had walked out through the Vicarage gate with his little handbag to pursue his task of circum-ambulating the coast of Great Britain and avoiding the requirements of the Compulsory Service Act. He had begun at the easiest point by choosing Cornwall; but he would probably find a good deal of difficulty in surveying the East Coast at all thoroughly. However, he was wise to create for himself enough obstacles to prevent his being bored by the restless existence he had mapped out for himself until the end of the war. Mark rather envied Mr. Horatio Fox. It was strange that a sceptic like him should have wanted to argue about the Roman claims and the anomalous position of the Anglican Church. One might almost suspect him of being one of those dissatisfied unbelievers who were for ever harping on the pettinesses of rival creeds out of an instinct of self-preservation. Mark remembered that when Fox had first spoken to him on the subject he had adopted an attitude of utter indifference. But had not that indifference been an affectation? It was scarcely possible for any man to take such pleasure in arguing about something to which he really was indifferent. It was strange, too, that he should have been so anxious to press the claims of the Roman Church. Mark wondered if he was an apostate priest. When one looked back at his personality there had clung to it a kind of stale ecclesiastical aroma. His cheeks had had that typical priestly glaze. Old habits of thought might have proved too strong for him, and he might not have been able to resist pointing out the illogical position of an Anglican clergyman who held such beliefs as his host. Perhaps the

real reason why he had gone away so abruptly was the fear that if he stayed longer he should be tempted to talk about his own past. An apostate priest must always be haunted by the dread of his former faith returning to him. Mark could never remember that he had ever heard of an apostate priest from the Roman communion who was happy. Yet he had met at least two English priests who had renounced their priesthood and embarked upon professions, and who were to all appearances perfectly happy and prosperous. Why was that? Why could an English priest apostatize without regrets, but a Roman never? To be sure, most of the Romans would have been led away by the flesh. *Cherchez la femme* was a safe explanation in the great majority of apostasies. English priests often did renounce their orders simply because they ceased to believe. They were not bound to celibacy and had less temptation and no necessity to forsake God on a woman's account. But might there not be another explanation? Might not . . . Mark thrust the question of the validity of English Orders away from him. He had not gone through all he had to be shaken now by the arguments of an apostate priest.

Nevertheless, the personality of Mr. Horatio Fox hung about the Vicarage when he had gone like the smell of a strong cigar. It was almost as if he still sat there talking and arguing continuously; and so much was he still there that Mark found himself arguing aloud in the silence with his ghostly opponent, and waiting for the empty space in the chair to respond.

The March wind boomed round the house, moaned along the empty corridors and went sighing in and out of the empty rooms. Surely, surely something would happen soon to end this futile waiting about for a martyrdom that never came.

"What would you do if you were in my place?" he asked of the empty space in the chair. "You were so very insistent on the duty one owes to oneself, Fox. What duty do I owe myself? It's a strange and sad thing, but only too horribly true, that I have not been able to pray since Christmas Day. Mass every morning at Chypie no longer means

anything. That fat fellow Kennedy consecrates without convincing me. It was all right so long as I said Mass myself; I had no doubts then, Fox. I had no doubts at all. But since I've had to give up saying Mass, for even I can't pretend that I should be within my rights to say Mass here in the Vicarage while old Cobweb, as Kennedy calls him, is saying Mass in the church, yes, ever since I've given up saying Mass myself I have begun to doubt. Don't think that you shook me, Fox, with your ridiculously superficial criticism. You had no effect on me whatever. I was shaken before I ever met you."

The wind rattled all the panes as Mark avowed this, and simultaneously there was a loud pealing of the front-door bell.

"I shall begin to think in a moment that Fox is Satan and that I have successfully conjured him to appear."

The bell pealed again even more loudly and more urgently than before.

Mark looked at his watch.

"Eight o'clock. It's not a Prawle. Miss Horton? She'd scarcely dare to come after my telegram. Fox? He wouldn't ring like that. The police at last? But they wouldn't come at this hour."

The bell pealed again. Mark threw back the curtains and looked out.

"It's black enough. I wonder if I'd better open the door? It might be a trick."

While he was hesitating he heard the tap of agitated fingers upon the panes, and, holding the lamp so that it illuminated the faces of the tappers, he saw Donald Evans and Arthur Tangye signalling to him from the darkness outside.

Mark hurried round to the front door to admit them.

"We've got some news for 'ee," Donald panted on the threshold.

"We've run all the way from Nancepean to tell 'ee, and it was some hard work running through the dark like we belonged," Arthur gasped.



"Come in, come in, both of you, and tell me why you've run all the way like this. Is somebody dying in the village?"

Both boys shook their heads and followed Mark into his study. Donald was white with the exertion he had made, Arthur red as a raspberry.

"You tell how we ran like we have, boy Arthur," Donald said. "I couldn't say not a word because I'm so breathed, and oh, dear, 'tis blowing some. Wait while I rest myself a minute and I'll be all right again. Go on, boy Arthur, tell why we've come."

Thus adjured, Arthur began one of his long chanted narratives, the manner of which had not changed in the least since Mark last heard one of them, and the intonations of which, heard once more after supposing for so long that he should never hear them again, moved him like an old tune that has been loved and lost and found.

"Boy Donald was looking for a thruppenny-piece he left drop this morning, and he was looking for it on the ground near Roscorla gate, because he thought perhaps he might have left it drop near there because he belonged pegging tops there with Charlie Woods this morning, and he said he weren't sure but perraps it jomped out of his pocket when he pegged, and when he was looking up and down, up and down, and couldn't never see the shine of his thrupenny-piece nowhere, there come a great parcel of wind, and blowed his lantern out, and he was all in the dark, and he hadn't got no matches nor nothing, and he said to himself, how wouldn't I go across Roscorla town-place and knock to the door and ask Mrs. Clemmow to give 'un a box of matches, and when he come near to the door he heard a sound go thomp-thomp, thomp-thomp, and 'twere old Miss Lassiter as was come thomping to ask Mrs. Clemmow something, and boy Donald was skeered so as he didn't know where to run and hide himself he was so skeered."

"My gosh, I was some skeered," Donald corroborated.

"He was skeered," Arthur continued, "because Miss Lassiter belongs to be an old witch, and when she come thomping along in the dark he was skeered to cross her path be-

cause she might have turned 'un into a Johnny Jakes and squashed 'un underneath her foot."

"But why should Donald be afraid of being turned into a snail particularly?" Mark asked.

"Because the other day I put a Johnny Jakes on her window when it were wet," Donald explained. "And it made a squeaking like a Johnny Jakes belongs to make crawling on a window, and she come out of her door and shook her stick at me and said, 'I'll pay you out for mucking up my clean window, Donald Evans.'"

"So that was how boy Donald was skeered Miss Lassiter might turn 'un into a Johnny Jakes and squash 'un underneath her foot," Arthur resumed. "And so when he heard her come thomp-thomp to talk to Mrs. Clemmow he jomped back and hid behind the barn door till she were gone in, and he thought he wouldn't look no more for his thruppenny-piece that night, but get up early before school and look for it again in the morning. And when Miss Lassiter were gone inside to talk wi' Mrs. Clemmow and he were just going to run back home so fast as he could, he heard a great sound of voices coming in along, and at first he thought it was devils come all the way up along from hell to take old Miss Lassiter down along with them to where they come from, and he jomped back again and hid hissself behind the barn door. But after a minute he found it wasn't no such a thing as devils at all. It were Mr. Stithian of Pentine and old Mr. Dale of Tallack and John Joseph Dunstan of Praa and Harry Dunstan and Bob Dunstan come down along from Polgarth, but Mr. Dunstan himself weren't come. But Mr. Martin of Nankervis were come, and some he couldn't be sure who they was, and when they was all come into the town-place Mr. Jago come out from the front door wi' Mrs. Clemmow and Miss Lassiter and George Pellow and Tom Pascoe and old Mr. Pascoe and Charlie Woodses' father and I don't know how many more, and they all belonged talking to once, and boy Donald couldn't understand what they belonged talking about, and then he heerd your name."

"My name?" Mark echoed.

“Yes, I heerd Mr. Stithian say, ‘If I’d my way I’d throw the —— over the cliff.’” Donald cried, leaping to his feet, his eyes on fire with excitement. “‘Yes, and so would I,’ Mr. Jago shouted. ‘And ’twould be just what he do deserve,’ old Miss Lassiter said. ‘’Twould be too good for such as he,’ Tom Pascoe said. And then old Mr. Dale of Tallack said: ‘I won’t have nothing to do with it if vi’lence is used. Turn the man out wi’ his furniture ’tis one thing, throw him over the cliff ’tis another, and I for one say “no” to any such a thing.’ And Mr. Martin of Nankervis he said the same as Mr. Dale, and so did George Pellow and the Dunstan boys, and all of ’em except Mr. Jago and Mr. Stithian and Tom Pascoe. But when I heerd them all talking so wild I didn’t know what to do, for I was skeered for ’ee, Mr. Lidderdale, and didn’t want for they should hurt ’ee, and there was a lomp to my throat and I thought I belonged fading away. And then somebody said: ‘Be Bert Prawle going to put the horses to the waggon?’ And Mr. Jago spitted on the ground, and said: ‘No, darn ’ee, I can put the horses to the waggon myself, and when Bert belongs to go up along to the Vicarage to-morrow for his crouse there won’t be nothing to eat, and I don’t reckon the Reverend Dowling ’ll make Bert his churchwarden.’ But when I heard Mr. Jago say that, I knew they was coming soon to do something to ’ee, and I run across the town-place and out of the gate. And some did shout, ‘Hi! who’s that running?’ But I didn’t stop till I come to Arthur’s house, and Mrs. Tangye wasn’t there, and I said: ‘Who’ll run with me so fast as they can to the Vicarage, and tell Mr. Lidderdale they’re coming to do something against him?’”

“And I said, ‘I’ll come with ’ee, boy Donald,’” Arthur broke in, “‘because I belonged to go once to the Vicarage with maid Susie when Mr. Stithian belonged shooting Miss Horton’s dog, and ’twere dark and blowing like ’tis to-night. I’ll come with ’ee,’ I said. And I couldn’t find my cap nowhere at all, and I come without it, and when we run past Roscorla we heard the stamping of the horses and Mr. Jago call, ‘Whoa! Steady! Get back!’ and so we knawed

they was coming quick behind us, and we run faster and faster."

"Hark listen!" Donald cried. "I can hear something!"

All three listened. Yes, above the booming of the wind there was the sound of wheels.

"They're coming. They're coming," Arthur proclaimed. "My gosh, I wish I had a German cannon so as I could shoot them all to pieces."

"Oh, Mr. Lidderdale!" Donald cried, bursting into a flood of tears and seizing Mark's hand. "I couldn't bear for 'ee to be hurt. I wish I hadn't gone out that day you come last to see mother. And mother *did* wish 'ee well. Only she said you was so contrary the way you belonged going on. Hark listen, the waggon is coming nearer!"

"I belonged to wish 'ee well too, Mr. Lidderdale," Arthur chanted. "I wanted for 'ee to say, 'How don't 'ee come down church now, Arthur?' Only you never said nothing. If you'd said something I'd have come the same as I always belonged, and if my mother told me to go chapel I wouldn't have gone to the dirty old chapel."

"Donald and Arthur," Mark said hurriedly, "I shall never forget all my life what you have done for me to-night. If I tried to tell you, you would not understand. You have saved me from something much worse than anything Mr. Jago and the rest of them can do. Donald, give your mother my love, and ask her to forgive me for anything I have said or done to hurt her. Don't be shy to say that. Don't just mumble a message so that she doesn't understand. Say just what I've said. You won't forget? Thank God you're both too young to be taken in this war, and so one day I hope I shall see you again. I've no time to say anything more now except to thank your brave little hearts. Donald, don't give up going to Mass, and ask your mother if you can't take Arthur up to Chypie with you, and ask Mrs. Tangye if she won't let him go. And now listen. I don't want you to be found here when these men come to do whatever they're going to do. Listen, I can hear the wheels of the waggon in the drive already. Go out by the kitchen door and hurry back home as fast as you can. Your mother will



be fretting to know where you are, Donald, and Arthur too, it's time you were in bed. God bless you both; I think that, like Tobit, an angel must have brought you to me."

"Like Toby Prawle?" Arthur chanted in some bewilderment.

"No, no, like Tobit. I told you the story once in Sunday-school."

"I remember," Donald said.

"Remind Arthur of it on the way home. And now run."

"But what are they going to do to 'ee, Mr. Lidderdale?" both boys wailed.

"Nothing serious. I'm sure of that. But I'd rather you weren't here when they come. Listen, the waggon has stopped outside."

There was a thunder of fists on the front door.

"I won't leave 'ee alone," Donald declared. "Boy Arthur, you won't go no more than me, will 'ee?"

"If you belong to stay, boy Donald, I'll belong to stay with 'ee."

"No, no, children, I want you to go," Mark begged. "They'll do nothing to me."

There was another thunder of fists on the door.

"They might if we wasn't here to tell of 'em. If boy Arthur and me stops beside 'ee, they won't dare to touch 'ee because we'd belong to tell the policeman what they done," Donald insisted. "'Tis no use for 'ee to tell us to go, because we won't go. Boy Arthur, look see what you've done."

"I can't help it," said Arthur, blushing with embarrassment. "When I belong to be in a tremble like I am now I can't help it. 'Tisn't because I'm skeered. 'Tis another kind of a tremble inside of me. 'Twere like when we was racing to the Band of Hope tea and waiting for the pistol to fire 'go.' I did it then, and I weren't skeered no more than I am now."

A voice outside the window shouted.

"You may so well open the door and be done with it, Parson. We're coming in if we have to break down the door."

"It's better to let them in," Mark said half to himself, half

to the boys, as he went out into the front passage to open the door.

The wind was rushing past in the darkness like a train.

"We've come to move 'ee, Parson," announced one.

Immediately the passage was filled with sullen figures who began to carry out the furniture and stack it in the waggon.

Mark went back into his study, where during his absence the boys had armed themselves, Donald with the poker, Arthur with the tongs. Fred Stithian and Tom Pascoe followed Mark, and when he saw the boys Stithian gave a huge guffaw.

"By gosh, Tom, if we haven't caught the ——," he swore.

"Stithian," Mark said, "I thrashed you once. If you say another word, I'll thrash you again."

The farmer made a threatening move forward.

"Mr. Stithian," Donald cried, raising his poker.

"Mr. Stithian," Arthur echoed shrilly, opening the tongs like another St. Dunstan.

"Mr. Stithian," said Donald, "if you dare touch Mr. Lidderdale I'll tell my father of 'ee, and if you touch me I'd be sorry for 'ee when my father gets 'ee."

"Quiet, Donald, quiet," Mark said. "Who's the leader of this party, Stithian, you or Jago? Who?"

Old Sam Dale of Tallack came in at this moment.

"We're sorry to behave like this, Mr. Lidderdale, but the people of Nancepean think 'tis time you were gone from amongst them. Your furniture will be taken where you want it taken; but you mustn't come back no more to the Vicarage."

"You can take my furniture to Penelope Prawle's cottage," Mark said. "Come along, boys, we don't want to stay here. Throw away that poker, Donald."

Mark was really anxious to get the boys away before Stithian or Jago or Tom Pascoe said something to make him lose his temper. He told them to wait for him downstairs while he packed a few things in a handbag. Then he wrote a brief note to Mrs. Evans, explaining what had happened and asking her to accept his books for Donald, and to see that the furniture was divided between the Prawles and the

Tangyes. The few pictures he had he asked her to keep for herself. Then he came downstairs and bade the boys come along.

"We'll go back by Church Cove," he told them.

The wind was blowing with hurricane force along the valley; but luckily it was at their backs, though even so the noise was too great to allow any conversation.

When they reached the churchyard gate, Mark asked them if they minded going home by themselves.

"But where are you going?" Donald asked.

"I'm going to Rosemarket. I shall take the road up the towans," he replied. "Give this note to your mother and the message I told you. God bless you both, brave and true little hearts. I shall never forget what you've done for me. Run, run. They'll be getting anxious about you at home."

He stooped and kissed them. Through a gash in the stormy clouds the starlight showed him his church for a brief space. Then the gash closed up, and the church became one again with the cliff. The boys were already out of sight. Mark turned his face to the wind and struggled on into the darkness, from which he would emerge only to be lost under another name in the deeper murk and utter darkness of war.

## CHAPTER XXV

### DE PROFUNDIS

**M**ULTITUDES of dappled green fish with diminutive gaping mouths and lidless eyes like gooseberries swam round Mark in cold stupidity. It was strange how easy it was to breathe the water, strange and rather pleasant, like nibbling candied angelica. If only it would not roar like this in his ears, he might be able to hear what these fish thought about him. Somebody had lowered a golden chain to haul him out of these dinosaurian immensities of depth, from these waters under the earth, from these noseless, noiseless fish. . . . Ah, agony, the golden chain held a barbed hook which he had swallowed. A voice cried, "Thou art thyself a faithless pisciculus and I Tertullian." Ah, agony of agonies, the water was thick and sticky as the juice of crystallized limes.

"If I am a fish, Thou art a fish. **IHEOTΣ XPICTOΣ ΘEOΤ TIOΣ ΣΩTHΠ,**" he cried.

"Forgive me, Divine Acrostic, and take this hook from my throat, and turn these waters to air. **IXOTΣ IXOTΣ,**" he cried again.

A surging darkness took the place of the emeraldine waters, and soon of the surging darkness a silent darkness, so silent and so dark that the pain of the hook blared like a trumpet and shone like brass. Then immortality was not a lie and pain endured after death and this was the Last Day. It was too dark to perceive the decillions of other souls being drawn upward like this, each a point of pain, hearing through pain, seeing through pain, and ah, smelling through pain this illimitable stench of corruption all around.

Mark opened his eyes to the whisper of rain drops and saw above him the endless monotone of a dripping dawn. Now that he was no longer being drawn upwards, the pain



was less, or perhaps not really less but diffused about his body and for the moment half quiescent. A great weight lay over him almost as far as his neck; but he could still move his head, and turning it to the right he found himself staring at the black oozy face of a corpse, a face of which the profile had already decayed so that it resembled a coconut. He turned his head to the left and looking downward saw that he was lying on the edge of a chute of mud, the bottom of which was invisible from his position. Had he climbed up this chute out of the mud and water at the bottom and fainted when he reached the comparative security of the top? What *had* happened? He turned to the right again and contemplated the black face of the corpse. That must have been dead a long time. That must have been buried once and then torn from its grave again by something. By what? If he could know what had dragged that corpse from the mud he should know why he was lying here. Those fish, of course, were a dream. Those fish were not real, and all that nonsense about Tertullian was part of the dream. And the fancy that he was being dragged up by a hook, that was part of the dream too. But the pain of the hook, that was real enough. Ah, yes, ah . . . indeed that was real enough . . . too real . . . it was tearing him to pieces . . . lacerating . . . one realized now what Prometheus suffered from that eagle's beak . . . tearing . . . lacerating . . . ah, it would have been so much better to die as he thought he had died than to lie here and be tortured like this. . . . Great God, how did the early martyrs survive their torments? One read of agonies that must have been as violent as these that he was suffering now; but they would not deny their Faith. How had they endured? How? How? Again it was coming. Ah, no, no, no, no, no, no, no more! Yet, they would not deny their Saviour. How did they hold out, if they suffered like this? And they must have suffered worse, because they would have seen the instruments of torture. That would have added to the pain. Again it was coming, ah, the worst of all so far . . . rending, carding, shattering, racking, excruciating, convulsing pain! And so much the worse, because, ah, he was entirely buried

except for his head. The earth which had been taken from that coconut-faced, stinking, black, oozy corpse had covered his living body. Was he lying, or standing, or twisted in some damnable arabesque beneath this weight of earth? *You don't hear the shell that gets you.* But the shell had not got him. So he ought to have heard it. Hear? Everything was horribly quiet. Was he stone deaf? He would try the effect of shouting at the top of his voice. Mark made a tremendous effort; but it was easier to shout in a nightmare than it was now. Only a queer strangled moan as the result of all that will to make a noise. Was it that he could not hear himself shout or was it that he had lost the ability to make a noise? What *had* happened to him? Had everything been shot away except his head? Was that legend true about the head of Charles the First winking at its executioner? But if he was only a head, should he be able to feel all this pain? Why not? He had often been told that one still felt the pain of an amputated leg. But if he was only a head he should not be able to move it. He could turn it to the right and stare at that black-faced corpse, and he could turn it to the left and see that chute of slimy mud. That was doing much more than Charles the First's decapitated head had done by winking, even if it ever had winked, which was doubtful. Ah, here was the pain again to let him know that he still had a body, yes, here was the pain to fork that body with white-hot prongs, to stab it with a serrated dagger, to thrust in a demon's hand and pull out the nerves like strands of elastic and let them flap back into a tangle of writhing worms. It was a pain beyond tears or shrieks of anguish. It was a pain that made a catherine-wheel of all normal expression and spun the sufferer into an orbit of more acute feeling where he had to begin again with laughter, a laughter that had nothing to do with mirth, but that expressed an agony beyond the capacity of tears or groans. If the pain lasted much longer he should pass beyond the capacity of expressing it at all outwardly, and it would rend him in silence until it rent his personality asunder.

"In other words, I shall faint," Mark thought. "And re-

turn to those gooseberry-eyed fish, until I am hooked up again into consciousness and able to suffer some more."

How *had* the martyrs kept steadfast? How had they been able to endure the prospect of torture added to torture until death released them?

"Why, I would deny God now if by denying Him I could ward off one more spasm. No, I wouldn't! I would deny myself! That was how the martyrs endured. They denied themselves."

The pain came swooping down again, and Mark gave it all his self.

"For it is right that you should suffer through your body, self, and perhaps in suffering you will learn that God is and does not seem to be. Look back, vile self! That was a deep stab, eh, but don't you deserve a deeper? Never mind about the pain for a moment. Just look back to that Sunday in the woods of Meade Cantorum when you saw that you were ugly. Do you remember what the Rector said to you?

*If in the future you are tempted to doubt the wisdom of Almighty God, remember what was vouchsafed to you at a moment when you seemed to have no reason for any longer existing, so black was your world. Remember how you caught sight of yourself in that pool and shrank away in horror from the vision. . . . We are all as ugly as the demons of Hell if we are allowed to see ourselves as we really are. But God only grants that to a few spirits whom He consecrates to His service and whom He fortifies afterwards by proving to them that, no matter how great the horror of their self-recognition, the Holy Ghost is within them to comfort them.*

"And what have you done, vile self? I was granted the knowledge of your hideousness, but I paid heed to the hideousness of others. My life has been a glorification of you. It was always what I believed about you, what I hoped for you, what I loved in you. It was your futility that worried me. It was your pride that was wounded by the suspicions of Nancepean. You pretended to love God and allowed me to love you. I rejoice now that I have flung you aside to be rent and twisted and racked by pain. I rejoice, do you

hear, vile self? I enjoy your pain. I revel in it. And don't think that I am confusing you with the material part of me. Oh, no, no, no. I am not indulging myself in any distinctions between matter and spirit.

"At last I understand:

*If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his Cross daily, and follow Me.*

*For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life for My sake, the same shall save it."*

The agony turned to a dull diffused ache that was almost pleasurable. The fiery thirst which had begun to assail him was quenched by a torrent of ambrosial rain. A dimness overcame him from which he was roused by the fancy that the nerves of his legs were being played upon like stringed instruments. In his thigh a ground bass of violas and violoncellos, on the hamstrings an infernal pizzicato, and all the nerves and tendons below swept by the cold high notes of violins. He even fancied that he could trace a kind of melody in these subtle vibrations which if written down would appear like the arboreal patterns with which worms have adorned the pages of ancient books. Then the playing ceased. A hemlock chill crept up his legs, or rather coiled round them in ascending spirals of iciness like a constrictor snake.

"This will reach my heart," he thought. "And then I shall die."

Somewhere from the past—was it yesterday or years ago?—a picture came back of advancing across the open and of an Irish priest, who had not secured a man's confession before he went over the top, running along beside him and shouting as he ran:

"Will you not be after wasting any more precious time, Mickey O'Dea? You're a fool, and you *will* be a damned fool if you make me run the good breath out of my body and you with a bullet through your head before I can give you absolution for all your sins. And me come all this way for a soul who'll be in Hell before the counter-attack. Say it after me. I confess to Almighty God . . . that's grand . . . and to Blessed Mary ever Virgin . . . and to you,



father . . . by thought, word, and deed . . . you're doing grand. . . ."

And just as the priest had given him absolution Mickey O'Dea had been killed.

"Did you ever see such luck now?" the priest had called out. "The bullet came as pat as an amen."

Had that happened yesterday or a year ago?

Not yesterday. But had there ever been a yesterday, or had it gone up with the rest?

The drowsiness returned. He was marching with his battalion. Marching, marching, marching, marching, and thirsty, thirsty, as if a horse's nosebag had been tied over his head. Dusty-thirsty, dusty-thirsty, dusty-thirsty. Yet everybody round him was laughing.

*For my breakfast I likes a bit of bread and cheese  
And a narf a pint of a-ill,  
For my dinner I likes a bit of bread and cheese  
And a narf a pint of a-ill,  
For my tea I likes a bit of bread and cheese  
And a narf a pint of a-ill,  
And for my supper I likes a bit of bread and cheese  
And a GALLON AND A NARF OF A-ILL.*

"Bill!"

"Wa 'ch,' 'rry?"

"The nex — awmy I joins 'll be the Selvation — awmy, mate, and don't chew ferget it!"

"Yaw ri, ma'."

Dusty-thirsty. Dusty-thirsty. Dusty-thirsty.

"Bill, why don't Chelsea out that lef' back? Caw! I never see such a silly — in my life. It fair give me the sick to watch him."

"Yaw ri', ma'."

"Not arf I ain't. What jew think?"

Dusty-thirsty. Dusty-thirsty. Dusty-thirsty.

*We are Fred Karno's Army . . .  
Have a banana!*

"Ere, when are they going to give us a 'alt?"

*The bells of Hell go ting-a-ling-a-ling  
But not for you and me.  
O Death, where is thy sting-a-ling-a-ling?  
O Grave, thy victoree?*

"An' he ups and calls me a barstid. An' I says, 'Ere,' I says, 'who are you —— well callin a barstid?' I says, an' I up an' 'it 'im on the 'ead with the —— shovel, I did. Yersse, an' got field punishment. Nice —— thing if any —— can up and call anyone a barstid an' no one can't do nothing just becaws there's a —— war!"

Dusty-thirsty. Dusty-thirsty. Dusty-thirsty.

Tea! Black, strong, smoky tea. And sweet tinned milk. Tea!

It would be sad not to see any of them again. They would probably be making tea now. They always were making tea except when they were fighting or asleep or dead. And how lovable, sitting round their kettles. Yes, it would be sad not to see any of them again. They were like the dandelions in the dusty London parks.

Dusty-thirsty. Dusty-thirsty. Dusty-thirsty.

"Want some water, mate? Wait a bit. You could do with digging out. If we hadn't of heard you singing, we never wouldn't have seen you."

"You see that black thing by me with a face like a coconut?" Mark asked.

"Seen quite enough like that," said the stretcher-bearer.

"No, not quite like that," Mark said earnestly. "That's my dead self. Rotten, isn't it?"

"That's all right, mate. Drink a bit more water."

"You don't believe me," Mark persisted.

"Yersse, I believe you. What makes you think I don't believe you?"

"Don't bother to pick it up," Mark said.

"No, we won't bother much about it. And don't you bother about it neither. Now then, Nobby, steady, get him on slow."

Rain-pain. Rain-pain. Rain-pain. Rain-rain-rain. . .

## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE HEAVENLY LADDER

MARK SMITH, emerging from the fog of war, was in due course demobilized, which left Mark Lidderdale free to devote all his attention to the problem of his future. He was like a man who has suffered a concussion and who, after remaining for a long time unconscious, is trying to recapture the continuity of his existence. Either he could start an entirely new life from this point or he could go back and try to pick it up from where he left it off that last night in Nancepean. Many apparently insoluble puzzles are solved by the need of earning one's livelihood. Mark was on the point of resuming his clerical attire and looking out for a curacy when Drogo Mortemer, the Vicar of St. Cyprian's, South Kensington, died, and by leaving him £250 a year prevented his being compelled by necessity to make an immediate decision. He had lived through those critical years that signalize the climax of a man's development from without; and now, in the month of May, a week or so after his thirty-eighth birthday, he grasped that he had to confront what was a considerably more complicated problem than was involved in deciding whether his experience during the war had been a temporary suspension of his normal consciousness or a complete annihilation of all that had gone before. For when he began to consider the life of a man he apprehended that, while it would destroy its unity to substitute for that unity diversity, it would be equally destructive of that unity not to include its diversity. He had to find a way to reconcile unity with diversity in his own life so that it would present unity in diversity and diversity in unity. The life of a man regarded from one angle was a series of successive steps from childhood to youth, from youth to maturity, from maturity to middle-age, from middle-age to age, from age to

old age; regarded from another angle it was a circle through childhood through youth through age through youth through childhood. But when the life of a man was not regarded from an angle, it was a *totum simul*, the successive or cyclic appearance of which was merely the frame of its temporal or spatial significance in eternity.

"Therefore," Mark thought, "I have to discover what to be with what I have done and what to do with what I have been, because whatever I shall do will be what I am at this moment and whatever I shall be will be what I do now? A fourth dimensional tense might express more clearly what I mean, and if there were such a tense it would incorporate the Present Indicative within the Future Perfect. The Future Perfect is so much the most subtle tense we have. The psychological necessity that invented it must have marked an era in human thought. Yet its very subtlety is its weakness. It is too anthropomorphic, too spatial, too temporal. God always speaks with the Present Indicative. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.* It was that Indicative which made the Jews pick up stones to fling at Him."

Mark chose a village in the Bernese Oberland in which to make his interior peace while the nations were making their exterior peace at Versailles. The name of the village does not matter, for he neither wrote letters thence nor received them there. It is never possible to escape entirely from tourists anywhere at any time in Switzerland; but this village was during May nearly free from them, and the few that visited the small hotel usually passed on the next day to more renowned achievements of scenery.

On these high Alpine pastures nature offered for Mark's contemplation a perfect unity in the diversity of earth, air, and water. The human mind upon the ocean, the human mind in the air, the human mind on the central plains of continents is often afflicted by a discontent that would be assuaged immediately by landfall or landing or view of the sea. Mark found that in these mountains he did not pine for the air, because earth at such heights partook of airiness; nor did he languish for the sea, because the waterfalls and



snow and grey torrents supplied its equivalent. The snow, too, was not merely the equivalent of the ocean, but the equivalent of the clouds also; while the sky beyond the peaks presented itself half as sky, half as sea. All these three elements were fused; each interpenetrated and pervaded the other; yet each was perfectly itself; while the unity was not merely immanent in the diversity, but at certain times was seen to transcend it. The fourth element, fire, when it excluded the others, had been used by humanity to express the pangs of remorse, the punishment of sin, the abandonment of hope, and all ultimately unimaginable and incommunicable pain; but it had also been used to express the greatest good when it played its appropriate part with the other elements. And surely nowhere might the sun display his beauty so marvellously as over these mountains and surely nowhere was his beneficence so gloriously apparent.

This unity in diversity declared itself more intimately than by this interpenetration of the elements one of another in their suffusion of the flowers, the birds, and the butterflies. The alpine-roses that shed such a warmth of earthy crimson along the track above the glacier, the mauve violas blossoming from the half-melted snow very near to the limit of its perpetuity far up the Jungfrau, the lilies of St. Bruno that brought the snow from the peaks to the lush valleys painted with flowers of every hue, all these were something more than flowers in their unity, but perfect flowers in their diversity. The birds, too, never appeared to escape from earth into air, so rarely were they seen against the sky; and yet so luminous was the earth they haunted that they might have been bright and rapid fish darting about in a magically transparent water. The slim cascades quivering and swaying like silver birches against the dark ravines were as much trees as waterfalls, and the trees themselves had the prodigality of tumbling water. The torrents and the stones over which they plunged were one, so that now the observer was dazed by the restless urgency of the stream and a moment afterward bewitched by the perception of it as a motionless quilt of grey velvet. The frequent tinkling of the cowbells was the very voice of the ice; and when a herdsman blew his

horn the mountains echoed back the sound from themselves in an exquisite and attenuated music that melted into silence as softly as the snow. But perhaps it was the butterfly, Parnassius Apollo, with diaphanous wings of ice, snow-powdered and dappled with vivid patches of red and blue flowers, that summed up in itself and expressed most perfectly the Alpine scene.

Yet while Mark rejoiced in this radiant unity and glorious diversity, he was filled with a melancholy. This emotion had nothing in common with the discontent roused by the imprisonment of sea or air or plain, or at any rate it was so much an extension and deepening of that discontent in proportion to its richer diversity in unity and its simpler unity in diversity compared with the other as to move aside and pass to another level of emotion. The essential earthiness of the plain and the wateriness of the ocean and airiness of the air oppressed the mind merely with a despair of their changelessness in space. The sadness was finite and curable. The desire for blue to break on green or green on blue was communicable and attainable. But here, where he held all nature in a paradisal microcosm so to speak, and where he actually did stand on the top of Europe aware of all the innumerable complications of social existence that were fed from this high silence, of hostile rivers that here were one, just as France and Germany and Italy were one in Switzerland, there was only eternity beyond and around him. The sight of the sea could not cure this ache, nor any view of outspread plain, nor any flight into the air above. Here he was not imprisoned by any single element in time and space; but he was suffering a captivity that was all the more onerous because in this buoyant and lucid atmosphere he was to himself so imponderable that he felt like thistledown which, while it manages to present the appearance of as much volition as a sentient creature, is immeasurably more active and much more truly free in its submission to the lightest breath than any butterfly or bird in its deliberate flight. It seemed to Mark that by making the easiest act of faith he could be blown out of time into that eternity, the nearness of which so yearned him in this ethereal landscape

and made him weary of its imperfection, just as when he was on the glacier the dirt and debris and broken surface became almost unendurable after he had peered into a crevasse and beheld the fiery blue of the virgin ice within.

However, this sadness of the unattainable was presently swallowed up in discovering the sublime paradox that he had attained the unattainable by the very fact of not attaining it. Mark fell upon his knees among the starry flowers and thanked Almighty God for His infinite mercy. Above his prayer he heard those words of Eternal Life:

*I am the good Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine.*

*As the Father knoweth Me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down My life for the sheep.*

*And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.*

*Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again.*

*No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again.*

A silvery mist had crept up the mountain side and turned the visible world to gossamer on which in a minuteness of liquid sound the tinklings of the cowbells were strung like drops of dew; but a moment afterward they were ringing so loudly that it seemed to be a mist of bells calling from the Divine Fold Itself. The cattle sometimes came near enough to appear as immense shadowy forms of faint gold with eyes of milk and wine in this evanescence of colour and transience of form which had supervened.

"O Earth," Mark cried, "how well do I perceive thee here as shifting and illusory, and even now as much more the shadow of thy own reality as thy own reality is less than the shadow of the shadow of Eternal Reality."

As he said this, the mist fell away like a veil. The starry flowers were visible again; the butterflies rose in clouds from every bush; the air throbbed and fluttered with the voices and the wings of jubilant birds; the sun beamed.

"But yet, thou art the thought of God, and therefore thou art at once a shadow and a reality. It is through thy shadow that we apprehend the reality and through thy reality that we perceive the shadow. We can apprehend Eternity in thee and in ourselves, which is the reality, and we can perceive Mortality in thee and in ourselves, which is the shadow."

Once more Mark fell on his knees:

"Almighty God, I thank Thee that out of Thy bountiful goodness Thou hast taken pity on my miserable faults and failures. Thou didst grant me Faith, and I lost it; Thou didst grant me Hope, and I lost it; Thou didst grant me Love, and I lost it. But now, O infinitely merciful Father, Thou hast revealed to me that by losing Faith and Hope and Love I have regained them by Thy Divine Grace a hundred-fold. For now I understand that none can be without the others and that they like Thyself are three in one and one in three, each perfect in its diversity and in its unity, the whole a perfect unity in diversity, a perfect diversity in unity."

When Mark reached his hotel that evening, he found an elderly English priest sitting on the wide balcony and looking out across the shadowy meadows and the dim pastures to where above them day was still in bloom upon the highest peaks like a late rose. They fell into conversation, found each other's company pleasant, and agreed to dine together.

The priest proved to be a Benedictine monk, the titular Abbot of some famous and noble foundation long ruined.

"*In partibus infidelium*," Mark said. He was wondering if he should tell this beautiful and dignified old man that he was himself what the other would have called a Protestant minister, or perhaps more kindly an Anglican clergyman.

The Abbot smiled, and asked his companion if he were a Catholic.

Mark felt that it would be a gross discourtesy to reply as he once would have replied: "Not a Roman Catholic," with a strong accent on the qualification. Yet he could not bring himself to answer with either a simple negative or affirmative.

"Well, I suppose I'm not what *you* would call a Catholic," he replied at last uncomfortably, "though I should not care



to be called, and certainly not to call myself, a Protestant."

The Abbot smiled good-naturedly.

"No controversy up here," he said. "What I want at the moment is a good novel. One of the minor horrors of the war was the extinction of Tauchnitz, don't you think? When I look back at my journeys abroad I see them in my old age all neatly bound up in a Tauchnitz volume."

"Alas, I haven't travelled enough to appreciate your vision," Mark said. "You are evidently one of those travellers I always envy on the continent. No railway-station ever seems to disturb their equanimity, and they are not even frightened of hotel-clerks. And, most infallible sign of their continental citizenship, no guide ever questions their enviable assurance."

"Ah," said the Abbot, shaking his head, "you're talking of Europe before the war. Since the capitals were invaded by passport disorganizations continental citizenship has ceased to exist. Now what are we drinking?"

"Oh, I'm not going to commit myself with this wine-list," Mark answered.

The Abbot examined it with care.

"I believe we shall be as safe with an Italian wine as with anything. Ah, here's a Barolo which may not be at all bad."

"I am in your power as the cork is in the power of the corkscrew," Mark observed.

"Not always," the Abbot chuckled. "And the softer the cork, the harder to draw. If immediately on top of that remark I ask you where you were during the war, please don't think I do so as a protest against your reserve."

They both laughed heartily.

"I was in France from 1916 onwards," Mark told him.

"Wounded?"

"Yes, but not badly."

"Well, it's over now," the Abbot said.

"I hope so."

"You sound a little doubtful."

"Well, I hope that the politicians are not going to mess up the prospects of peace after the war as successfully as they messed up the prospects of peace before it," Mark said.

"I heard a retort the other day which amused me. It was apropos of something that Lloyd George or one of them had said about making a land fit for heroes to live in. 'Yes,' this fellow commented, 'it would take a hero to live in it now.'"

"Anyway, we have the League of Nations," the Abbot suggested.

"Do you really believe in any possibility of such a hotch-potch of ideals, interests, and ambitions becoming vital?" Mark asked.

"I do and I don't," the Abbot replied. "As a Christian and a Catholic I can't help feeling that the Church offers all that and more than the League of Nations offers, and that what the Church has not yet been able to effect is hardly likely to be effected by a body without any visible or, I fear, invisible unity. As a humanitarian I rejoice to see the temporary triumph of what is a genuine ideal over the forces of cynicism; but I cannot see an enduring life for any League of Nations that refuses to admit the vanquished to its councils. However, I pray that Almighty God will bless the work, for anything that tends, however ineffectively, toward the unity of the human race will help the hearts of men to desire that perfect unity in which Catholics recognize the only possible future, institutionally speaking, for the world."

The conversation turned away from serious topics for the rest of dinner, and afterward they took their coffee on the verandah of the hotel in the face of a full moon that almost seemed to bump along the mountains like a great silver ball until she made her southing and hung serene and clear at the head of the pass.

The placidity of the moonlight encouraged confidences, and Mark was several times on the verge of asking advice of the old priest about his future; but each time that he tried to frame the question his heart failed him, for he knew that there was only one piece of advice that the Abbot could give him and that, if he should argue against it from his own point of view, this old man, on whose tongue was wisdom and in whose eyes burned holiness, might suppose him to be no more than one of so many religious hypochondriacs whose

main object was the discussion of their own symptoms and whose interest in the cure was measured entirely by the amount of importance it lent to the supposed variety or singularity of the symptoms. The answer was so obvious really, and if he should insist on the fact that he was already a priest, the Abbot would just shrug his shoulders and propose a more profitable subject for friendly intercourse after dinner. A younger cleric might enjoy such an argument and find a pleasure in destroying his companion's logic, might even derive great spiritual satisfaction from a successful conversion. But this ripe old man was not likely to care much about that. He represented something in humanity that was as solid and as impressive as the mountains opposite. That face, clear-cut in the moonlight as the outline of a crag, had long outlived the pleasures of persuasion. Why should he bother to argue about the claims of the Church? Of what that Church was his personality was a living proof. Why should he bother to convert an individual Anglican whose desire for the true religion would present itself to his judgment at its best as the kind of tepid idealism of the League of Nations, as something to be helped with prayer, but not as something to argue about, and certainly not as something to argue with.

"You are pensive," the Abbot said.

"It's this sublunary world," Mark replied. "I was thinking about the League of Nations." He wanted to add: "And its resemblance to the Church of England." But he was ashamed to give an impression of sneering at his birthright of Anglicanism.

"The trouble with such an association," said the Abbot, sipping wryly his glass of gentiana, a detestable liqueur, but the only one that the hotel could produce in those desiccated times, "the trouble, apart from its preliminary assumption that the vanquished nations are utterly in the wrong and the conquerors as utterly in the right, is what looks like proving the incompatibility of English and French ambitions. Each great nation will be liable to obtain its support from the smaller nations in much the same way as a party leader. The very interest that Lord Robert Cecil takes in it is almost a

guarantee of the application of the principle of party government. Now, the Latin nations have no conception of party government as we understand the business in England. They cannot imagine the amount of compromise, self-sacrifice, and discipline that is necessary to carry on the system we have in England. Opposition with them must have a concrete object to oppose. It must be dictated either by strong feeling that what the other side wishes to do is wrong, or by a determination to bring about the fall of a demagogue who has had his run. They have no tradition of politics as a game for grown-up men to take the place of the cricket or football of youth. An amateur politician will always seem to them an anomaly. Indeed, they won't believe in him, and the bewilderment that Sir Edward Grey created in the European mind during the war will be re-created by Lord Robert Cecil, should the League of Nations endure for more than a year or two, after the war."

"Is the incompatibility as much between the Anglo-Saxon point of view," Mark queried, "as between the insular and the continental? And of course the trouble now is that we have allowed America, whose culture is largely built up on the middle-class English culture, to beat us at our own game. We may be a nation of shopkeepers; but America is a nation of co-operative stores, an emporium, not an imperium."

"But we are not a nation of shopkeepers," the Abbot declared forcibly. "Or if we are, the French must be accounted a nation of female bargain-hunters, and I think we may allow them a keener commercial instinct than the dignified and conservative English shopkeepers. But of course we are not a nation of shopkeepers. We were not dragged into this war out of anything except sentiment. We heard France screaming like a woman and we saw Belgium being knocked about like a little girl; and that is the only reason why the English nation entered this war. I am not talking about politicians or soldiers or sailors or newspaper-proprietors. But they are not the English nation. It was precisely that sentimental but profoundly sincere conviction of the morality of our action which made the English nation suppose the Pope to be a pro-German, because he tried to keep sentiment



out of his attitude. It is impossible to make the average Englishman understand that the Pope was bound to take many other motives into consideration besides the Englishman's consciousness of his own chivalry, and that in time of war matters of fact and matters of opinion are not so clearly divided as they might be."

"You're right about the sentimental Englishman," Mark said. "Really the relation between England and France is rapidly approximating to that of two lovers who have formed a liaison, and who while the hard world was against them were able with a few tiffs to fight through. Now when the need to fight has gone by they are trying to think of a way of regularizing their position. England the man is anxious to get on with his business, and is beginning to find that France the woman is rather a responsibility. France wants marriage, or in other words an alliance, and England is ready to marry her provided that rich Uncle Sam will guarantee some of the household expenses. France suspects that England really doesn't want to marry her. And England vows he does, so long as it can be managed. England talks a great deal of all that the two of them have gone through together; but the more realistic woman (who only affects sentiment and romance when in distress) requires wedlock. England would like to let the love-affair fade out to a warm friendship. America, the sentimental uncle, even more sentimental than England, thinks that it's time the two young people earned their own living. He has come to their rescue at a time of stress, but he is afraid of being asked to contribute to their European establishment indefinitely. He distrusts the various country estates which they are acquiring, and he is not at all placated by being advised to buy one for himself in Armenia."

"And yet," the Abbot went on, "one may wish that a real marriage could have been brought about between the two nations—a religious marriage however, not a lay contract, which is all that a military alliance would mean." The old man fell into a reverie. "What an effect upon the world! What a hope for the future of humanity," he murmured to himself presently. "If only France and England could re-

nounce their nationalism, and in that renunciation regain the incomparably richer nationalism of the Church . . . dreams . . . dreams . . . idle dreams. . . . Yet it *is* hard to contemplate such an expense of heroism and endurance, such an outpouring of constancy and valour and unselfishness for nothing that really matters. That the peace of Europe should only be secured by the exhaustion of the combatants does seem a fruitless result of such a seedtime of blood. We expected a new world to be born from that immense catastrophe. Many still profess to behold that new world shining before us. Alas, I fear that it shines without warmth, like the moon. We cannot know the individual benefit from so much suffering. I believe that we incur a grave moral danger by talking too much in terms of peoples. To be sure I have no business to be theorizing about individuals, for what have I suffered in myself? But you who have been through it, do you feel that resentment against Almighty God which some of the intellectual humanitarians I know seem to feel so strongly? It struck me just now, when you were elaborating your comparison of England and France to a pair of lovers trying to escape from an entanglement without losing its sentimental value, and in the case of the lady without forgoing the practical advantages of a regular union, it struck me that the cynicism of the moment had got hold of you. I firmly believe that such cynicism is only the reaction of fatigue to any great enterprise nobly carried through. The best book we write becomes wearisome to ourselves before it is finished, and we are apt to laugh at it."

"On the contrary," Mark affirmed, "I have never felt less cynical than at this moment. I'm afraid the superficial resemblance led me on into making rather a cheap simile. And in any case I was thinking more of the politicians. After three years in the army one acquires an almost mechanical dislike and distrust of politicians. Yet really when I look back on the war I'm beginning to think now that more of our mistakes were due to the incompetency of the Higher Command than to the blundering of politicians. But this is not the time to jeer at politicians or generals, and you must just regard it as a bad habit acquired in the trenches."

"I'm ashamed to ask you questions about your experiences," the Abbot said, "but, you know, ancient non-combatants like myself have never lost our interest in the activities of younger men. If you feel disinclined to talk about your own part in the war, don't hesitate to tell me so and close my senile lips. Were you an officer?"

Mark shook his head.

"I wasn't even a corporal," he explained. "But I ought to tell you first of all that I'm an Anglican priest."

"Ah, you were a chaplain?"

"No, no," said Mark. "I enlisted and fought in the ranks. I had been deprived of my living for disobeying my Bishop. I don't expect that it would interest you to hear the history of my ecclesiastical career."

"On the contrary," the Abbot replied, "it would interest me extremely."

Mark felt that it would be a discourtesy not to take the Abbot at his word, and he launched forth upon the history of Nancepean.

"I thought that I should be able to decide best about my future in the Church of England by trying to look at it from outside. Perhaps I didn't expect that I should be given such a long time in which to reach a conclusion, though as a matter of fact it wasn't long enough, for I've not yet reached that conclusion. Yet when I was wounded I had a strange mental experience out of which I ought to be able to make something."

"Tell me about that," the Abbot invited, "unless of course you feel that it is something too intimate to repeat to an inquisitive old man."

"I will tell you about it willingly," Mark replied, "though it will sound just like a feverish dream in the repetition, and indeed it was so inseparably bound up with the shock of the explosion that I have been tempted to regard it as nothing more than the extravagance of delirium. Yet the vividness with which it remains in my memory, and not merely in my memory, but incorporated within my present outlook, gives it a reality that the visions of fever usually lack."

With this Mark tried to convey his thoughts when he was lying wounded on the edge of the mine-crater.

"Have you ever read the *Vita e Dottrina* of St. Catherine of Genoa?" the Abbot asked.

"I've often meant to, but I never have," Mark replied. "Why do you ask?"

"Your vision of the golden chain with the hook at the end of it reminds me curiously of her experience. Somewhere, if I remember rightly, she speaks of God descending by the golden thread of His secret love to the end of which is fastened a hook, which catches up man by his heart and draws him nearer to God. I haven't read the words for many years, and I may be misquoting. You get the same idea in Dionysius, whose luminous rope suspended from Heaven touches earth and enables us to climb up by it. With him it is a symbol of prayer. You get the same analogy somewhere in Plato. Is it in the *Theatetus* or the *Republic*? And you even get it in the *Iliad* when the gods descend by a golden chain from Olympus to earth. But the parallel with St. Catherine doesn't stop here, for in the dialogue between her and the Lord, He tells her that His love can better be known by inward experience than in any other way, and that, for man to gain this Love, Love must snatch man from himself, because it is his self that is his own chief obstacle."

"And now my trouble," said Mark, "is to know what to do with my new self, or rather as I ought to try to think it my new non-self. The generosity of a dead friend has left me with a small independence, so that I have been spared the necessity of an immediate decision. Since I have been here and wandered about these high mountains I have discovered more about God than ever before. I'm not suggesting a kind of nature-worship, and in saying that I have discovered more about God here, I think I am not being quite accurate; I think that I have discovered all I know of God from the love of children and the love of my fellow Tommies; but that love became crystallized up here, and by looking through it as this triplicity of earth, air, and water I have apprehended something of God's perfect unity in perfect diversity. I seek now the unity that shall gather up the diversity of my own soul.



I feel that it lies in the Catholic Church, but I cannot deny my Orders. I cannot believe that I am not a priest, that every Absolution I have given and every Mass I have said were without sacramental efficacy. To you I must seem like a swimmer breasting an ocean of moonshine such as that which spreads before us at this moment; but what to you is moonshine, to me is fathomless water on which I lack the faith to walk, and in which I have not the courage to drown."

Mark was silent, nor did the Abbot speak for several minutes.

"My son," he said at last, "it would be idle to argue with you, for neither you nor I should gain anything by argument. A Thomist might say that you are drawing near to the Church by the wrong road. But I should be tempted to ask such a theologian if there can be a wrong road to salvation. And I believe that St. Benedict would say that you were drawing near by the right road. By the way, have you ever studied the Rule?"

Mark thought of the days long ago in the Order of Saint George; but he could not persuade himself to reveal the circumstances in which he had studied the Rule of St. Benedict.

"I have not studied it for a long time," he said.

"I commend it to you," the Abbot went on, "though I am not going to suggest the particular chapters that might answer your question. Let that rest for the moment. Up here in these mountains you have drawn near to God. You seek to know how you may keep yourself from losing that precious knowledge. The Grace of God alone can do that. Your mystical experiences have perhaps—I speak in all humility—have perhaps not taught you quite all you might have learnt from them. There was once a more objective vision accorded to one who was no mystic. It was no golden chain or luminous rope, but a ladder upon which the angels of God were beheld ascending and descending. It was, if one may say so, a more practical affair in some ways than your chain. I could wish you might behold it. Meanwhile, may I suggest that you should pay a visit to Monte Cassino, and if when you have visited Monte Cassino you still lack an answer to your question, I hope that you will go to Subiaco. But do

not go to Subiaco first. I will give you letters, so that you may not feel a tourist. Not that such letters are necessary in any Benedictine house. And now let me beg you to put aside from your mind for a little while the problems you are trying to solve for yourself, and help me to find a good novel."

Mark understood that the Abbot intended by this last remark to express his belief that one can talk about oneself too much, was indeed dismissing him like a doctor who has written out his prescription.

A day or two later they travelled together as far as a central railway station whence the Abbot journeyed north to England, and Mark went south to Italy. He heard Mass on the feast of the Ascension in the church of Trinità dei Monti, but he did not linger in Rome, and he reached Monte Cassino in the week before Pentecost.

Mark left behind him the squalid and noisy little town of San Germano which lies in the shadow of that venerable mountain whose summit is capped with the buildings of the monastery as inevitably as Vesuvius is haunted by its cloud of vapour. He had rejected the idea of driving up by the modern carriage road, preferring to ascend on foot by the ancient mule-track so that he might follow as it were the natural curve of the progress of European civilization, for Monte Cassino is the very abstract of history in the external evidence it offers of what man was and is and may be, and the very essence of humanity in the way it shows the activity of evil transformed to produce the activity of good, turned back sometimes toward evil, but always by the grace and mercy of Almighty God rescued finally for good.

The classic view widened beneath Mark's feet; although he could not name the famous mountains and cities he beheld, it affected him like the golden timelessness of a landscape by Claude. This was the season when the Italian harvest goes rioting to a prodigal culmination. The corn between the olive-trees was already yellowing; the cherries were flushed; the scent of the vine-flowers was heavy on the air. And yet somehow it was still spring. The drouthy cicalas had not yet filled the orchards with their fritiniency, so that he still heard the murmur of bees, and listened to the

mountain-thrush singing and saw him flash his black and azure plumes among the boulders on either side of the track. Mark pressed on. A Gothic castle poised upon a peak overhanging San Germano on the farther side: the remains of a Roman amphitheatre: a tomb of measureless antiquity: a grove of primeval holm-oaks left here by St. Benedict to mark where once Venus was worshipped in their shadow: an Austrian fort: a modern carriage road: a wooden cross, and on the rock beneath it the print of St. Benedict's knees where he knelt to pray God to grant him strength to drive away from this mountain Apollo and Venus, the demons to whom sacrifices were still offered here: a line of cyclopean walls, the relics of some Pelasgian citadel older even than that tomb: the great abbey, with its innumerable small windows and austere façade, rising from terraced groves and gardens: a Roman gate-tower for entrance, the same under which Benedict had passed coming from Subiaco over thirteen hundred years ago and in the upper storey of which he had made his cell: all these outward signs he beheld.

Mark had not expected from the severity of the outer walls to find within their enclosure that light and lovely *cortile* of Bramante breathing the spirit of the Renaissance. St. Benedict had thrown down the altar of Apollo and replaced it with one to St. John the Baptist. Fragments of the old pagan marble were still to be seen; but the Apollo thus humiliated was a debased deity. What had been worth while in his worship once had surely been exquisitely revived in this *cortile*. Might not even Dante had thought so?

*Quel monte, a cui Cassino è nella costa,  
Fu frequentato già in su la cima  
Dalla gente ingannata e mal disposta.  
Ed io son quel che su vi portai prima  
Lo nome di colui che'n terra addusse  
La verità, che tanto ci sublima;  
E tanta grazia sovra me rilusse  
Ch'io ritrassi le ville circostanti  
Dall'empio culto che'l mondo sedusse.*

But when Mark first saw Bernini's florid basilica with its cherubs and draperies, its roses and garlands and gilt, he began to wonder if Dante might not have been scandalized as much by it as by the thought of the deceived worshippers who once came here to consult the fraudulent oracle. And might not Benedict himself have rejoiced that his bones should lie in Fleury on the Loire, counting the cherubs of Bernini's basilica worse than the Lombard hordes which had overrun his mountain and driven him forth, heresy though it were to whisper here one's belief that the bones of the holy father no longer reposed in their first tomb? But when Mark saw the crypt decorated by the German monks of Meuron and heard the exclamations of outraged Italian taste, he began to apprehend that immense unity in diversity of the Benedictine Order. Each congregation might seem a household, but each household was indeed a congregation. St. Gregory said that Benedict beheld God and in that vision of God beheld the whole world. St. Thomas was not able to accept this; but Mark, gazing out across Campania from the *loggia del Paradiso*, saw Aquino far down below at his feet, and he believed that St. Benedict did behold that light which is the Creator and in that light the whole world as if within a single ray of the sun; yes, the whole world—spatially and temporally, the length and depth and breadth of it, the beginning and the end. Such a vision was almost necessary to explain the perseverance of the mighty patriarch, for the age in which he lived must have seemed irreclaimably corrupt and inextricably confused. The night of barbarism was settling down upon Europe with nothing to illumine its darkness except the bloody lightnings of war or the ashen fires of pestilence and famine. Christianity handed over to the rabid wolf of Arianism seemed incapable of surviving the persecution of the Vandal, the Goth, and the Visigoth. Art, literature, morality, law, and justice overwhelmed: heresies and schisms rife: feeble popes under the heels of brutal princes. This was the world from which the young patrician fled in order to regain it for God, not by fantastic austerities, but by work and prayer, by clothing the naked and healing the sick, by relieving debtors and helping the afflicted, by



cherishing the poor and entertaining travellers, and by burying the dead. He and his followers devoted themselves to sustaining a normal Christianity as laymen, not as priests. They preserved the continuity of the Christian tradition, and in doing so they preserved all that man had won in his upward struggle. Well did Urban VIII say that Benedict deserved while yet in this mortal life to behold God Himself and in God all that was below Him. Mark wondered if anybody had called Benedict the second Noah, or likened Monte Cassino to Ararat and the Abbey resting on its summit to the Ark, for compared with this the League of Nations on the shores of Geneva was no more than a crazy barge which the first small flood would submerge.

Although Mark appreciated the Abbot's intention in advising him to go to Monte Cassino, he could not help saying to himself that it told him nothing he did not know already of the Catholic idea, and very little that he did not know already of the Catholic reality. Before he left the monastery and plunged down again toward the lowlands of Campania, he came upon an inscription carved upon a solitary rock:

*O Padre nostro che sei nei cieli affratella a noi l'Inghilterra nella unità della Fede.*

"Our Father Who art in Heaven make England a brother of ours in the unity of the Faith."

Yes, but how could that be so long as post-Tridentine Catholicism made its ultramontane claims upon England? How could that be so long as hundreds of English priests were not recognized as priests? The way to reunion was barred by Rome, as securely as it always had been barred.

Yet, when Mark was in the train and looked back at that mountain, immutable and grand from every point of the compass, appearing and disappearing with the curves of the railway-line, until at last it vanished, a cloudy pile, into the remoteness of the lucid air, he felt like the dove that was sent out from the ark, the dove that found no rest for the sole of her foot; and he wished that he could return to that ark with a pluckt olive-leaf as a token that the waters of

war were abated from off the earth and that the true peace of faith, hope, and love in unity was achieved.

Why had the Abbot warned him so particularly to visit Subiaco after Monte Cassino? Why was he to reverse the footsteps of St. Benedict?

The train roared on across the Campagna. *Rome's ghost since her decease*, Browning had called that immense form of air and grass strewn with the bones of aqueducts.

*The champaign with its endless fleece  
Of feathery grasses everywhere!  
Silence and passion, joy and peace,  
An everlasting wash of air—  
Rome's ghost since her decease.*

Mark, gazing out of the windows of the carriage, made up his mind to journey to Subiaco on foot.

He left Rome very early next morning and slept at Tivoli; but he did not stay long amid those enchanted groves and grottos, those temples and tumbling green cascades, for he wished to reach the Abbey of Santa Scolastica by Friday evening, so that he might spend the vigil of Pentecost in Benedict's Sacred Cave. The mountains closed in upon the road, which grew wilder with every step. He hurried faster and faster, his heart beating with the conviction that somehow before he trod this road again he should be at peace.

Mark reached the abbey about dusk; and next day at dawn he climbed the steep mile that separated it from the smaller monastery of the Sacro Speco. As at Monte Cassino, the pilgrim passed through a grove of primeval ilex-trees before he drew near to the object of his pilgrimage. These relics of that fabled Saturnian age must have shaded the footsteps of Benedict when he first came here centuries ago. Did he mark the glinting of the sun's golden patens on the mossy ground, or was his mind already intent on those three years of contemplation that were to fit him for the task he had in hand? Yes, he must have noticed this holy virgin shade and willed that no man should violate it with wedge and axe

until the end of time. And when he and his companions were driven to flight by the abominable Florentius, perhaps on Monte Cassino he had spared the holm-oaks of Venus in memory of this grove.

Mark emerged into the sunlight and saw in front of him the monastery of the Sacro Speco, built on huge arches into the face of the cliff. He passed through a Gothic doorway inscribed above with the names of the illustrious pilgrims who had visited this holy spot—twenty saints and fourteen popes besides many princes, queens, and emperors, and entered the highest of the three churches built one on top of the other to enclose the upper and the lower caves of St. Benedict, the oldest Gothic churches in Italy and worthy to enshrine what for long had been the beating heart of Christianity.

Mark spent hour after hour wandering up and down the Holy Stairs from shrine to shrine and from church to church in that dim harmony of multitudinous forms and fancies. Every arch and every ceiling and every wall was a paradise of glowing frescoes, and every smallest bit of space was a jewel of colour or a gleam of gold, except where here and there the naked rock broke into the building and brought home to the pilgrim that this was indeed the cave of Benedict and that all this radiant conception of Christian faith was only made possible by that three years' sojourn among the savage and inhospitable rocks during which he learnt from God the wisdom and the strength to save the world for civilization.

Of all the frescoes that which drew Mark's steps back oftenest to gaze upon it was the contemporary portrait of St. Francis of Assisi, who, in 1218 or 1222, midway between St. Benedict and ourselves, had turned aside to worship here. The fresco must have been painted as nowadays one would take a photograph, for the portrait was of plain Brother Francis without the stigmata, without the saintly nimbus, with nothing but a scroll in his left hand inscribed *Pax huic domui*.

Peace to this house! That long, thin face and sparse beard beneath the high pointed hood, the prominent ears,

the fine hands and nose and frail neck, and, beyond all, those eyes at once humorous, ecstatic, grave, and compassionate of God's Little Poor Man of Assisi, had a vitality even in this fresco far greater than the vitality of any living person Mark had ever met. The face of Christ shone out from that Byzantine portraiture; and even as Francis was granted to wear his Saviour's wounds, so might he have been granted the image of his Saviour's countenance. Brother Odo, the diffident little Benedictine monk who painted it, had added a miniature of himself kneeling at the saint's feet, and even in that humble position only daring to show his face and clasped hands. Perhaps he had timidly painted himself in when Francis was canonized ten years later.

Mark went out at last into the *roseto*, a diminutive garden made by terracing the rocks in the angle of the monastery buildings. This place, once a thicket of briars, had been the scene of St. Benedict's great temptation of the flesh, which he had overcome by rolling his body among the thorns until it was covered with wounds. God's Little Poor Man had visited this place hundreds of years afterwards and had grafted on the briars sweet-scented double-roses; and to this day these roses of St. Francis had remained here, and there were no thorns upon them.

Mark sat down and gave himself up to the sweet influences of this ledge in space. The mighty face of the mountain rose behind him, and the little garden came to an end just beyond where he was sitting, in a precipice that ran sheer to the bed of the sounding Anio far below. All else was the vivid blue of the Italian sky. He took from his pocket the Rule of St. Benedict, and began to read:

*Of the various kinds of monks.*

*It is obvious that there are four kinds of monks. The first are the Cenobites, that is those who do their service in a monastery under a rule and an abbot.*

*The second are the Anchorites, that is Hermits who, not in the first zest of conversion, but by the daily trials of the monastery have already learnt by the help of the many to fight against the devil; and going forth well*



*armed from the ranks of their brethren to the single-handed combat of the solitary place are now able to fight in safety without the help of others and by their own exertions to overcome, under God's aid, the vices of the flesh and their own evil thoughts.*

Yet St. Benedict himself fought the solitary fight before he founded his order and won it when still a young man in his twenties. But he feared solitude for others, and he was right to fear it. Such a solitude as his own at Nancepean, Mark thought with a shudder, might easily have brought him to damnation, if he had not fled from it into what had really been a kind of monasticism, the active service of war. Yes, St. Benedict used *militans* in the original Latin to describe the service of monks who lived under a rule and abbot.

*A third and truly detestable kind of monks are the Sarabaites, who having been tried by no rule as gold is tried by the fire, and having learnt nothing from experience, and being soft as lead, keep faith with the world in their works while, as their tonsure proves, they lie to God. These men in twos or threes or singly without a shepherd shut themselves up not in the Lord's sheepfolds, but in their own, where they make a law for themselves out of the pleasure of gratifying their own desires. Whatever they think or choose to do, that they call holy, and what they do not like, that they consider unlawful.*

The tinkling cowbells of the high Alpine pastures sounded again through the silvery mist.

*And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.*

A sharp question cut the golden meshes of his fine-spun meditation.

Was not the Church of England a church of Sarabaites?

*The fourth kind of monks are those called Gyrovagues, who spend their whole lives in wandering about different provinces, staying in different cells for three or four days at a time, always roaming, never stable, given up to their own pleasures and the snares of gluttony, and worse in every way than the Sarabaites. In regard to their miserable existence silence is better than speech.*

A sharper question pierced his soul.

Was not he himself a Gyrovague?

Mark spent that night between sleeping and waking, and always in the darkness the stern face of St. Benedict reproached him and always the eyes of St. Francis pitied him, and prayed for him, and laughed at him; but at Mass the church was filled with a sound from Heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and Mark heard above that sound Truth speaking with the voice of a little child:

*If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself; and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.*

*For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for My sake, the same shall save it.*

After Mass he went out into the rose-garden and denied himself, saying: "I am not a priest," and a profound tranquillity fell upon his soul.

He opened the Rule of St. Benedict and read:

*Whence, brethren, if we wish to attain the summit of humility and swiftly to reach that heavenly exaltation to which we can only ascend by the humility of this present life, we must by our ever-ascending actions erect such a ladder as that which Jacob saw in his dream, by which the angels appeared descending and ascending. This descent and ascent are to be understood by us not otherwise than that we descend by exaltation and ascend by humility. And the ladder thus erected is our life in the world, which if the heart be humbled is raised by the Lord to Heaven. The sides of this ladder we call our body and soul, and in its sides the Divine Call has inserted the various rungs of humility's discipline by which we may ascend:*

THE FEAR OF GOD.

THE SURRENDER OF SELF WILL.

THE OBEDIENCE TO OTHERS FOR THE LOVE OF GOD.

THE DELIGHT IN THE HARDSHIPS OF SUCH OBEDIENCE.

THE CONFESSION OF OUR SINS.

TO BE CONTENT WITH THE WORST AND ESTEEM ONESELF A  
BAD WORKMAN.

TO CALL ONESELF VILER THAN ALL AND TO BELIEVE IT.

TO KEEP THE RULE AND TO IMITATE ONE'S SENIORS.

TO KEEP ONE'S TONGUE SILENT UNTIL ASKED A QUESTION.

TO BE NOT EASILY MOVED TO LAUGHTER.

TO SPEAK GENTLY, HUMBLY, AND GRAVELY.

TO SHOW THE HUMILITY OF THE HEART IN THE BEARING  
OF THE BODY.

Mysterious Ladder which St. Thomas Aquinas preferred to put the other way round! There was something that even the angelic Doctor did not know.

*Having, therefore, ascended all the rungs of humility, the monk will soon reach the love of God, which being perfect puts fear out of doors whereby he shall begin to keep all precepts, which hitherto he used to observe with some dread, without striving and as it were naturally and habitually, no longer through fear of hell, but for the love of Christ and out of the good habit of virtue and delight in it: which God will deign to show forth by the Holy Ghost dwelling in His workman now cleansed from his vices and his sins.*

Mark fell on his knees.

*O Holy Ghost, Thou Who in the bosom of the Holy Trinity art the indissoluble bond, the living tie, and the eternal embrace between the Father and the Son, unite me to our Lord Jesus Christ and through Him to the Father. Grant me the temper for that region and that sanctuary where our life is established for ever.*

*Grant me to reach it by the one way which Our Lord traced and Himself followed: the humility of little children.*

Mark longed to be received into the Church immediately; but he thought that it would be presumptuous to seek reception here. So, on the feast of St. Anthony of Padua, he came to Crapano and asked the parroco to give him instruction in the Catholic Faith.

The parroco was enchanted by the prospect of receiving an Englishman into the Church, and ascribed it to the gratification of St. Anthony at the lavish way in which his children had just celebrated his feast. He had been starved of fireworks, *poverino*, throughout the war, but they had made up for it this year as Mark would admit. Yes, Mark would be the first Englishman he should have had the privilege of converting.

*"Ma il nostro padre Sant' Antonio è buon' assai! Dovrebbe essere molto contento che la guerra sia finita."*

The good man set out to look for the penny catechism, and when he had found the little green booklet he suggested that Mark should grapple with its theology a few pages at a time.

*"Piano, piano! Forse Lei non capisce, ma sarà un poco difficile."*

Mark was not to overstrain his memory. When one was no longer a child, it was difficult to learn things by heart.

Mark promised that he would turn himself back into a child so as to learn the catechism by all his heart.

*"Bravo!"* the parroco cried. *"'E bella, la giovinezza!"*

Mark agreed that youth was very beautiful. And he, like a child, was beginning life all over again.

#### EXPLICIT

#### POSTSCRIPT TO C. K. SCOTT MONCRIEFF.

My dear Charles,

I lack the wisdom, the learning, and the holiness for propaganda. As I know that you for one will acquit me of



such a presumptuous intention, I am giving myself the pleasure of writing your name at the end of a novel called Faith, Hope, and Charity.

Yours ever,  
Compton Mackenzie.

ISLE OF JETHOU.  
March, 1924.









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